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UpComing Events

Monday, Feb. 7

Junior High Boys Basketball at Aberdeen Christian. 7th grade at 6 p.m. followed by 8th grade. Girls Basketball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli. C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and then Varsity. School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 8

Girls Basketball hosting Tiospa Zina with JV game at 6 p.m. followed by Varsity. Boys Basketball vs. North Central at Edmunds Central with JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by Varsity.

Wednesday, Feb. 9

LifeTouch picture re-take day at Elementary School

Thursday, Feb. 10

Basketball Double Header at Milbank. 4 p.m.: Girls JV at elementary gym, Boys C game at Armory; 5 p.m.: Girls C game at elementary gym, Boys JV at Armory. 6:15 p.m.: Girls Varsity at HS Gym, 7:45 p.m. Boys Varsity at HS Gym.

Friday, Feb. 11

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

Saturday, Feb. 12

9 a.m.: State Junior High Wrestling at Pierre
Basketball Doubleheader with Mobridge-Pollock in Groton. Girls JV at 1 p.m. followed by Boys JV, Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity
Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg

Monday, Feb. 14

GBB at Flandreau Indian - JV at 5 p.m. followed by varsity



"Before anything great is achieved, your comfort zone must be disturbed."

- Ray Lewis -

Tuesday, Feb. 15

Boys Basketball at Sisseton
C game at 5 p.m. in the Practice Gym; JV at 5 p.m. in the varsity gym followed by Varsity game
Junior High Boys Basketball hosts Tiospa Zina. 7th Grade at 5:30 p.m. followed by 8th grade game.

Wednesday, Feb. 16

Band Trip to Orlando, Fla.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

OPEN: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Lana's Annals-Week 4 Pierre Report

Greetings to all. More bills and resolutions rapidly dropped this week as all had a house of origin deadline. As a result, the numbers of pieces of legislation have now found their way to the Speaker assigned committees and will now either meet with passage or defeat as they continue down the pipeline.

My education committee usually has spirited debate on many different issues, and last week was no exception for what can be donned as "talkers." HB1172 provides for presenting scientific information to students in an objective manner. Bottom line, issues are examined from both sides. One example would be the teaching of global warming. Many texts have students explore all of the negative effects that global warming causes and how to alleviate those problems. The bill would have us, instead, probe the converse side as to whether concept exists at all, and what has caused world leaders to believe this. That way "point and counter point" is probed. The opposition implored us to teach the science of it. As scientists cannot even agree on issues, I voted in favor. Teaching critical thinking skills is far more important than exploring a subject in only one direction.

After much discussion on HB1091, a request of 5 million state dollars to build a new rodeo practice facility as SDSU, our committee defeated the idea. The testifiers presented a good case that horses are stabled away from the current facility, creating complications. The schedule for using the current facility was also in conflict. For example, barrel racing practices may cut into roper' practices. I voted against sending this to appropriations for the following reason: no general fund dollars have been used for a club sport. Five million dollars has been privately raised for the project and the committee felt that perhaps in the near future, the remainder could be raised through donations. The prior projects presented to us from other colleges this year have asked for spending authority only (meaning all of the funds for their projects has been raised and only approval to spend is asked).

We had the discussion on preventing derogatory Indian mascot names in our schools. Two examples mentioned were "Braves" and "Warriors." While I do not see these as offensive words, perhaps they are to some. I asked why these are not ok; the answer was that in schools that have less than 50 per cent Native population, it is not acceptable. I pointed out that one of our schools has the name "Redmen," which must meet the required student population 50 per cent or more Native attendance; however, why then do those who are not a part of the majority, not then protest that the name is a derogatory name to them? No answer. This example just goes to show that it is easy to "spin" things to our own satisfaction, which reverts to my earlier comments of being able to see both sides of an issue. We did not pass the bill but left decisions like these to local control.

The proposed CO2 pipeline has been the talk of many people in this portion of the state. What it is is a proposal only to lay pipe from Iowa to North Dakota to theoretically remove CO2 waste from the ethanol plants who have verbally committed to that idea.(the largest, POET, did not). The pipes would be placed 4 feet deep on private farmlands. The final destination would allegedly be to store this waste below the rock in North Dakota. Employees of Carbon Solutions have been busy surveying on private land, much of the time without permission, and trying to have farmers sign easements. This is, so far, an unapproved project as the PUC has not even looked at it or had any hearings, and I feel compelled to inform the public of that. Personally, I wondered about the rush to get permissions in place from our area farmers so I started doing a little research. Aside from the fact that the pipeline blew in Mississippi and caused a number of illnesses, I found that a group called Battelle is involved as project investors. This is the same group that Spink County sent packing when they wanted to do bore hole drilling to see if the ground was stable enough to store canisters of nuclear waste. Even though they said they were only going to drill multi-million dollars worth of holes in the Tulare area as an experiment of ground stability, the people knew they were paving the way for nuclear waste to be in our backyards. This made me wonder what would actually be stored in North Dakota who, by the way, also threw this group out on the bore hole hoax. It is food for thought and makes one wonder. I realize that the bill of goods has stated that they are here to save the ethanol industry, which many people, including me, wholeheartedly support; however,

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I question whether the "Solutions" federal grant project is here to help or just put money in the pockets of those who had the idea. I also question what will actually end up being stored in North Dakota. Conspiracy theory? May; maybe not. The House did pass a bill that, should the project be approved, these lines will be taxed.(HB1120).

We are starting to see more high school government classes visit. This past week I had the pleasure of introducing Groton High School and instructor Scott Thorson and also Hitchcock-Tulare with their teacher AND my former student, Bill Barrie. Also in the House I had was honored to introduce the Outstanding Teachers and Administrators of the Year. The latter included Dr. Becky Guffin, Superintendent of Aberdeen Schools (part of my district) and Fran Ruesink, principal of Dell Rapids Schools (formerly from Castlewood). I also enjoyed visiting with Jim Hulscher, Doland; George Seiler, Redfield; Peter Books, Castlewood; and Chris Lee, Willow Lake, attended administrators day at the Capitol.

Until next week, I ask for your prayers that we make wise decisions on your behalf. The days will get longer going forward and tempers will get shorter!!

Rep. Lana Greenfield, District 2

Lana.greenfield@sdlegislature.gov or lana.greenfield@gmail.com

Glimpses From Greenfield 2022–Week 4

The legislature has now reached the bill introduction deadline. The House has dropped 339 bills, while the Senate has 212 bills in-play. A total of six Joint Resolutions have also been introduced, with three on each side. Joint Resolutions generally call for further action by proposing new Constitutional measures to the electorate. However, they may also be used to call for the state to participate in federal conventions that would seek to amend our US Constitution. Bills, on the other hand, seek to enact new or modify existing laws (statutes).

Because there has been a modest focus on South Dakota joining the effort to call for a "Convention of States", I will touch on that briefly. I have studied this issue at-length. Moreover, I was one of three legislators from South Dakota who had the opportunity in 2016 to participate in a mock convention that took place in Williamsburg, VA. After all has been said and done, I am not convinced that a convention will yield the positive results people anticipate. Before I go on, I would note that we have had a call for a convention on our books since 2015. That one contemplates acting on a "federal balanced budget amendment". Subsequent attempts have been made in the ensuing seven years that would call for us to participate in broader conventions. In the end, I believe if a convention is called for, Congress will set the initial rules, which could be further modified by convention-goers. As was the case in 2016 at the Williamsburg event, the convention exceeded the scope of authority it was called for. I would also note that despite efforts to provide assurances that delegates to a convention would only be able to act on specific measures, once a delegate travels to an outside jurisdiction, they are no longer bound by SD-specific laws. Said another way, when we travel to Minnesota, once we hit the border, we must modify our speed. If we get stopped doing 65 mph, we cannot tell the Minnesota police that we are from South Dakota where the speed limit is higher than their 60 mph limit. The same is true of laws that we pass that contradict rules of a convention in another jurisdiction. In my opinion, the possibility of attacking the 2nd Amendment, the electoral college, and a host of other matters our current Constitution embodies is too great. I would also note that Barack Obama is still a relatively young man. I would guess if the Constitution is opened up for potential amendments, there would be some who would argue that lifetime term limits for US Presidents should be revisited. On the flip-side, some of the most ardent supporters of holding a convention want to see term-limits for Congress addressed. The idealists say, "We'll be able to get rid of Schumer or Pelosi or this person or that." Well, I'm sure A.O.C. would love for the path to be cleared for

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her to run for the US Senate. And knowing how she operates, I'm also reasonably sure she'll have one of her acolytes groomed to take her place in the US House. Sometimes there's more to an issue than meets the eye. And, yes, ratification must follow any proposals that are offered, but in the sound-byte world we live in, we have seen dramatic changes in how people look at issues. I do believe the threat of a runaway convention is real. I've personally witnessed it. And my question to those who love and cling to our Constitution is "Why are you so hasty to want to change it?" We should push for enforcement of the original intent of what is written in black-and-white and not allow for political gamesmanship to change the most revered document in the history of world governments. I would also note that several names of people from across the state have been enlisted as "supporters" of the movement to call for a broader "Convention of States" but when I have visited with SOME of those people, they say they have NEVER signed anything that would imply their support. And I will refrain from stating a name, but this has happened to one of my siblings and any number of other unsuspecting South Dakotans. Granted, there are some of you reading this who are sincere in your support of the movement. Honest minds can disagree. I respect that. But when the people in charge of the movement from other locales are not providing truthful information, it undermines the very cause they are promoting.

There were not a lot of high-profile bills that made their way to the Senate floor last week. Most of my time was spent hearing funding requests in Appropriations and meeting with constituents. A very brief overview of some bills follows. HB 1025 was brought by the Bureau of Human Resources to reflect the federal law that notes June 19th, commonly called Juneteenth, is a federally recognized holiday going forward. The bill has passed both the House and Senate and is awaiting the Governor's signature. HB 1069 seeks to include out-of-state drug convictions when somebody commits a drug crime in South Dakota. Failure to do this would be akin to inviting drug dealers to come to South Dakota and start with a clean slate if they've been convicted elsewhere. This bill got hung up by a procedural move in which a fiscal note has been requested to determine the impact on our prison population if the bill should pass. SB 77 seeks to enhance the penalty for convicted sex offenders who commit subsequent sex offenses against minors. This bill passed the Senate unanimously and will be heard in the House in the near future.

Hopefully next week I will have more meat-and-potatoes to bring you up to speed on. For now, we are in a holding pattern as we await the decisions on some of the more high-profile bills.

Until next time, be blessed and stay well.

Brock

The Entire Cast and Crew

When you watch a medical drama on television the main characters are generally doctors, nurses, and patients. We rarely learn about the many extras in the background. In an actual hospital, patients are cared for by their doctors and nurses, along with a large supporting cast and crew. Many of these people on stage and behind the scenes rarely get their name in lights. I would like to introduce them now.

Before a patient arrives at the hospital, we often rely on emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and transport teams to safely bring them to the hospital via ground ambulance, helicopter, and airplane.

Once the patient reaches their hospital room, those providing direct patient care include nursing assistants and patient care techs. They literally do much of the heavy lifting in the hospital. There is an entire team of therapists including physical, occupational, speech, and respiratory therapists who play a role in developing a rehabilitation plan for each patient. Wound care nurses help manage complex wounds and ostomies. Various radiology techs, phlebotomists and lab staff help administer the tests needed to diagnose patients.

Some play the role of teacher at the hospital. Dieticians, pharmacists, and diabetic educators help patients learn about their conditions, medications, and behaviors that can help them live healthier lives. Social workers and case management teams arrange after care plans including social supports, which take effect when the patient is discharged. Many hospitals have palliative care teams and hospice teams whose primary goal is reducing suffering and easing pain. Pastoral care teams help with emotional and spiritual support for patients and their family.

We perform our jobs in a clean, healthy environment thanks to the dietary and kitchen staff, maintenance crew, and housekeeping team. Without them we would be hungry, thirsty, and cold, without clean sheets, gowns, and towels.

Information Technology departments maintain patient portals and electronic medical record systems giving patients and their care teams access to essential information. Billing, coding, and insurance filers ensure the patient data entered is accurate and timely. And there are many others I won't have the time to mention here.

As a hospitalist, I'm a big fan. I get to work with these professionals every day and each of them is a star of the show in my opinion. Television and movies may give doctors and nurses all the attention, but I hope I've successfully turned the spotlight on the entire cast and crew doing their part for a successful patient story. I hope you join the fan club!

Jill Kruse, D.O. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices as a hospitalist in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



By Jill Kruse, D.O.

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Pro Bowl plus Viking Head Coaching News

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

Pro Bowl

The 2022 Pro Bowl happened. There wasn't much tackling. It's tough to talk about a game that was essentially a flag football game sans the flags. The AFC set a record by winning for the fifth consecutive time, while the highlight of the game was Stephon Diggs playing defense against his younger brother Trevon Diggs.

Minnesota Vikings News

In Minnesota Vikings news, the team "hired" their new head coach, Kevin O'Connell, Wednesday. The word "hired" must come with quotation marks since the Vikings technically cannot hire O'Connell until after the Super Bowl because he is still on the Los Angeles Rams' coaching staff. O'Connell, who has been the offensive coordinator for the Rams for the past two years, will be yet another head coach to be hired from the Sean McVay coaching tree.

Although O'Connell comes to the Vikings with zero head coaching experience and a lot of uncertainty, there are still some things to look forward to. For starters, when he was an assistant coach in Washington, many described him as a "tall Sean McVay." Although this might not seem like anything, it is still interesting to know that many in the Washington organization felt that O'Connell had a similar demeanor and coaching style to McVay, who has been one of the best head coaches in the NFL since being hired in Los Angeles in 2017.

Moreover, O'Connell has been one of, if not, the vital piece to developing the offensive game plans for the Rams offense. The Rams, who will face off against the Bengals in the Super Bowl next week, took a gamble this offseason by trading for quarterback Matthew Stafford. With the help of O'Connell, Stafford, who had never won a playoff game before this season, has been able to have his best season yet. It will be interesting to see if O'Connell comes in and does the same with Kirk Cousins, or if the Vikings decide to trade Cousins away and start a rebuild.

The happiest man on earth right now might be Justin Jefferson. When asked about the hiring of O'Connell this past weekend at the Pro Bowl, Jefferson responded by saying, "I have been watching the Rams offense... They have some tremendous plays, Cooper Kupp was wide open all the time. I'm excited for it. This is my first head coach that's going to be on the offensive side instead of the defensive side, so I'm happy." As a reminder, Kupp led the NFL in receptions, receiving yards, and receiving touchdowns this past year and might be the Offensive Player of the Year to show for it. If O'Connell can do for Jefferson what the Rams have done for Kupp this past year, then the sky is the limit for Jefferson.

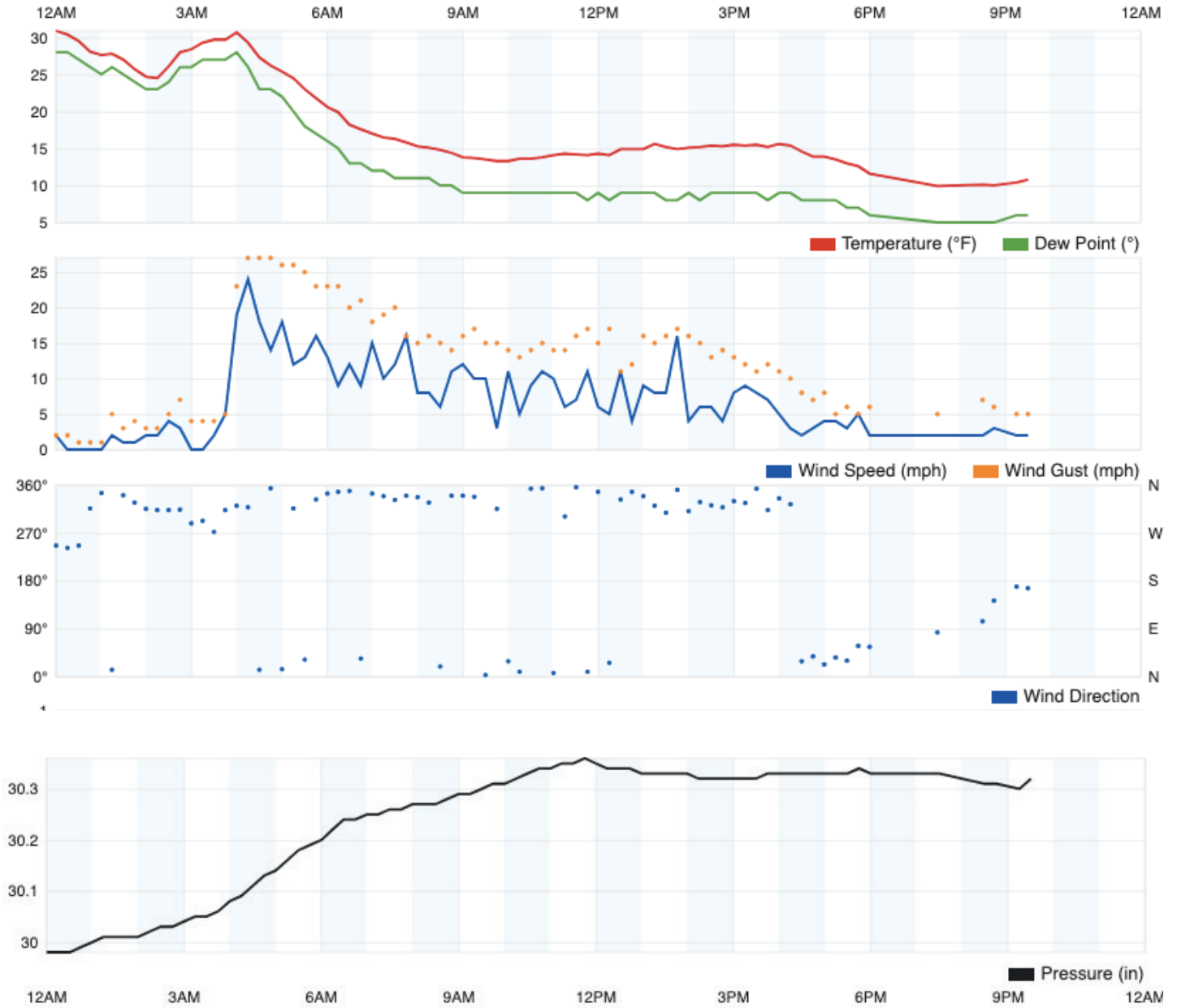
Since O'Connell cannot be officially hired until after the Super Bowl, there is not much information on who will make up the rest of the Vikings' coaching staff. As of right now, the Vikings have lost a number of their coaches from this past year to other teams: offensive coordinator Klint Kubiak went to the Denver Broncos, and quarterbacks coach Andrew Janocko went to the Chicago Bears. I would assume that we will see more names depart once O'Connell officially takes over as the head coach and puts together his coaching staff.

In all, it is a new day for the Vikings organization, one that is young and offensive-oriented.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 47 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 29 °F

Tuesday



Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 41 °F

Tuesday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 26 °F

Wednesday



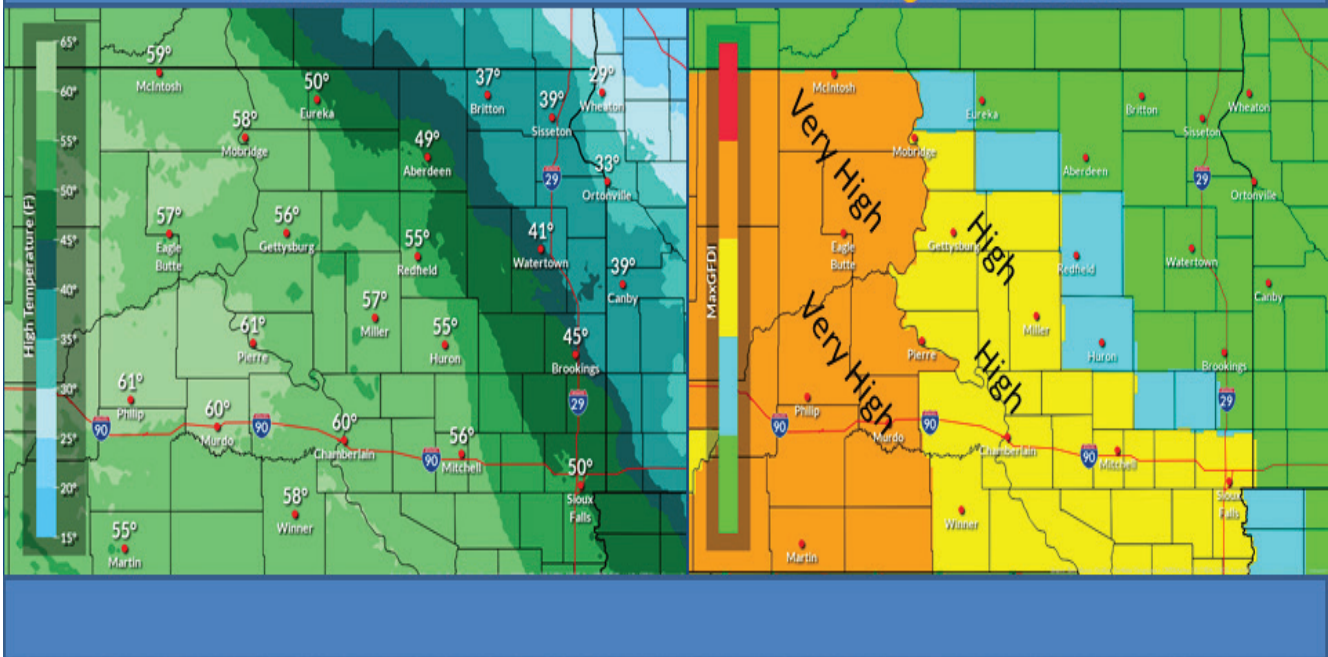
Partly Sunny
then Partly
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 33 °F

Much Above Normal Warm Temperatures Today...Grassland Fire Danger Reaching High To Very High Across Much Of Central And North Central South Dakota

Temperatures 30 Degrees Above Normal At Pierre

Fire Growth Potential This P.M. Highest West River



NWS Aberdeen, SD
Updated: 2/7/2022 6:09 AM CST

This afternoon, breezy to windy west to northwest winds will develop. The air will also become rather warm and dry today, especially across central and north central South Dakota. Combining the increasing winds with the relatively warm dry air will result in the Grassland Fire Danger Index topping out in the High to Very High Category.

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Today in Weather History

February 7, 1994: Snow falling over the area produced heavy accumulations from central into northeast South Dakota with 11 inches at Kennebec and eight inches at Watertown from the 7th through the 9th. Extreme cold accompanied and followed the snow with low temperatures of 52 below zero at Promise and 45 below zero at Aberdeen on the 9th. Snow accumulation caused a roof to cave in on a drugstore at Bristol. A man died of exposure attempting to walk home near Sioux Falls after his car became stuck in a ditch.

February 7, 2001: Heavy snow of 6 to 16 inches fell across central and northeast South Dakota, resulting in school and activities cancellations, closing of some businesses, and challenging if not impossible travel. Several people became stranded and had to be rescued. There were also flight cancellations and delays, along with some vehicle accidents resulting in minor injuries. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Mound City, Mobridge, Eureka, 7 inches at Milbank and 6 SE McIntosh, 8 inches at Aberdeen, Ipswich, Selby, Iona, and Britton, 9 inches at Clark, 1 S Columbia, Isabel, Webster, and 10 inches at Roscoe, Watertown, and 1 W of Summit. Locations with snowfall of a foot included Mission Ridge, Murdo, 4 NW Onida, Castlewood, 23 N Highmore, and Timber Lake. Thirteen inches of snow fell at Canning and Fort Pierre, 14 inches fell at Gettysburg, Eagle Butte, and Pierre with 15 inches at Miller and 16 inches of snow at Clear Lake, Mellette, and Faulkton.

February 7, 2010: A compact but strong area of low pressure moved from Canada and across the Northern Plains from the 7th through the 9th. A prolonged period of moderate to heavy snow developed over far northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, bringing 6 to 8 inches of snow to the area. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Milbank, Wheaton, and Ortonville; 7 inches at Clear Lake, Sisseton, and Artichoke Lake; 8 inches at Summit, Victor, Wilmot, and Browns Valley.

1812: The Hard Shock of the New Madrid Earthquake series strikes the area around the small town of New Madrid, Missouri. A three-mile-long island, Island #32, was completely sunk! The Mississippi River once again ran backward. This major shock marked the beginning of the end of New Madrid's extended ordeal, even though aftershocks would continue to be felt for years, and the fault is still active.

1835: A Great Freeze took place from February 2-9 across southern Georgia, southeastern South Carolina, and northern Florida. During this freeze, the St. Johns River was frozen, "several rods from the shore," and people were able to walk a distance from the shore. Many citruses and other fruit trees were killed to the ground, never to grow again, when temperatures reached as low as 1°F in Charleston and 8°F in Jacksonville. A Florida gentleman told a newspaper that the state "appeared as desolate as if a fire had swept over it" after the severe freeze of that winter season. According to Florida Citrus Mutual, this freeze was so severe that it is considered an impact freeze. This indicates that the freeze annihilates entire groves across the state, killing both mature and young citrus trees while causing a profound economic impact on the citrus industry and prompting growers to replant farther south. This freeze ended attempts to grow citrus in southern Georgia, southeastern South Carolina, and northern Florida.

1892: The temperature falls to 90 degrees below zero in Verkhoyansk, Russia, on this day. The temperature was considered the coldest temperature ever recorded in the Northern Hemisphere. However, this reading was done by a spirit thermometer, which is less accurate than a mercury thermometer. The accepted record was 90 degrees below zero in Oimaykon on February 6, 1933. However, recently published report by the WMO, the coldest temperature in the Northern Hemisphere is -69.6°C (-93.3°F) on December 22nd, 1991 at Klinck Automatic Weather Station (AWS) Greenland.

1904: A small fire in the business district of Baltimore, Maryland becomes wind-whipped into an uncontrollable conflagration that engulfs a large portion of the city by evening.

1933: The USS Ramapo, a 478 ft. Navy oiler was traveling from Manila to San Diego when it encountered the tallest rogue wave ever recorded. The wave measured 112 feet in height was caused by 70 mph winds over a broad fetch of the ocean.

2017: Six tornadoes traveled across southern Louisiana. The strongest tornado, an EF-3, impacted eastern New Orleans.

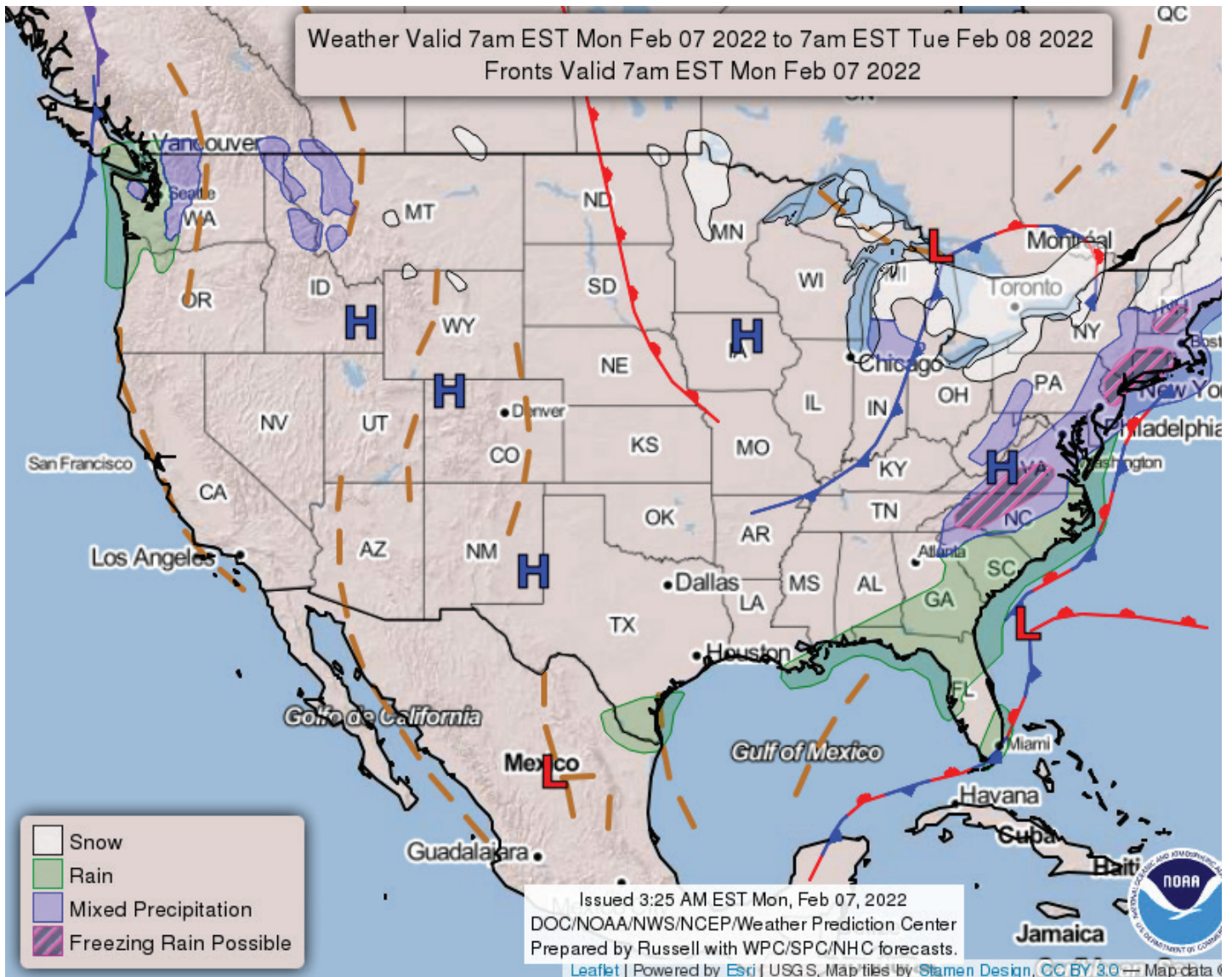
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 31 °F at 3:56 AM
Low Temp: 10 °F at 7:15 PM
Wind: 29 mph at 5:32 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 62 in 1987
Record Low: -42 in 1895
Average High: 26°F
Average Low: 4°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.14
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.69
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 5:49:28 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:42:10 AM



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CENTERED!

The word "heart" in the Bible refers to "the center of things" or the "inner man" or "the governing center" of man. There is no suggestion in Scripture that the brain is the center of our consciousness, our wills, or our thoughts. In fact, some Biblical scholars believe that the "First great commandment probably means 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart' - that is with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." In other words, what is in our hearts is what comes out in our lives.

Looked at from this point of view, the heart is essentially where our thoughts and desires and goals and values originate. So, we can say that for the Christian, life is "lived from the inside out." Sooner or later, if it's on the inside, it will surface on the outside. Then people will know who we are and what matters most to us. Indeed, seeing is believing.

The Psalmist gave us this truth when he wrote: "I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You." Jesus added His wisdom to this very basic truth when He said, "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart...For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

One of the most popular advertisements on TV is the one that asks, "What's in your wallet?" But in the end, the answer to that question is not important. It's "What's in your heart" that matters most. If God's Word is in our hearts, He will be obvious in our lives!

Prayer: Help us, Father, to spend time in Your Word and with Your Word so others will see Your Word in us. Help us to maintain the integrity of our relationship and witness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You. Psalm 119:11

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2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start
(4th of July)
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion
Baseball Tourney
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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Ailing pork farmer turns trips to Mayo into research mission

By ROB NIELSEN Yankton Press and Dakotan

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — For Karl Schenk, a health crisis helped him find a new — and ultimately, award winning — economic opportunity to keep his farm viable for future generations of his family.

Last month, Karl Schenk and his namesake Schenk Family Farms were recognized with the 2021 Master Pork Award at the South Dakota Master Pork Producers Council's 2021 Banquet in Sioux Falls.

Specifically, the farm was recognized for the efficacy of its three-year-old swine operation — an operation that had its genesis, in part, due to a serious health crisis.

"Seven years ago, I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and we went to Mayo (Clinic) quite often for chemotherapy and checkups," Schenk told the Press & Dakotan. "We started taking some of the backroads through northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota and stopped in some of the small towns, eating in cafes and you'd strike up conversations with people."

During these conversations, Schenk met a number of farmers who had successful agricultural operations that included two or three hog barns.

It was during stops in these small towns in Iowa and Minnesota that he also noticed something distinct — prosperity.

"It made you start to wonder, 'What's working?' because these little towns were so strong economically," he said. "Their downtowns were full, two or three concrete companies, the schools were nice and new."

Schenk said it was during one treatment session that he had a conversation that would make him seriously think about a pork operation.

"I was sitting in a chemo chair at Mayo and there was a gentleman next to me, and we struck up a conversation," he said. "He was a pork producer from southwest Minnesota and he raised about 30,000 head of finishing pigs. He didn't hate anything about them and he would like to expand if he could. That kind of got me to start looking into it."

He said another factor in exploring diversification was family.

"With a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, which isn't very optimistic, your family runs through your mind a lot," he said. "How am I going to make this farm viable for those who want to come back?" And after lots of research and talking to a lot of people, we decided that some diversification into the modern swine industry would fit our farm very well."

Since then, Schenk has added five total barns to his property — four finishing barns and a nursery barn — all rated for 2,400 head each.

"We work those barns ourselves, and that gives us some labor income and we also get a rent from the facilities," he said. "It's a nice return that outpaces the cost to fund."

But perhaps the most important impact has been in bringing family back to the area. This includes his son-in-law Ian and Karl's daughter Meghan. His daughter Kyra comes back on weekends while attending South Dakota State University and his son Karl also plans to return.

"Between the farm, the barns and the symbiotic relationship, there's room for many family members to return," he said.

Schenk said the award came as a surprise to him.

"I'm honored to receive it," he said. "I'm pretty new to the pork industry — only been in it about three years. My family stepped up to the plate, my employees stepped up to the plate and we all asked a lot of questions. We were drinking from a fire hose for a while, but we learned a lot. We probably bugged a few people asking questions, but I think people like to be mentors."

He said the South Dakota Pork Producers Council considered a number of facets of the operation, including the fact that it has under a 2% mortality loss rate, daily gain of feed efficiency of 2.7 pounds — statistics Schenk said top many industry standards. Criteria examined also included environmental stewardship,

animal care and employee care.

In addition to his swine operation, Schenk has also been involved in agricultural advocacy locally with Families Feeding Families.

But he's found that, even with some of the controversies that have come in Yankton County attached to value-added agriculture, one of the best approaches for advocacy is one of the simplest.

"It's fun to sit down one-on-one with people and show them how modern these barns are, that they're enjoyable to take care of, that the animals are comfortable and so many variables can now be eliminated for the health of the animal," he said. "One of the people who initially opposed the barns now works for me. He's learned a great deal, he appreciates the opportunity and he has realized some conceptions that he had were incorrect. He has a better understanding and appreciation today, and it simply took some calmness and some one-on-one interaction and some first-hand experience."

Ultimately, Schenk said the award is a reflection on all of the people — both family and employees — that have made his farm operation viable for generations to come.

"It is a family and farm award," he said. "It's not just me."

Burger battle nets \$667K for Sioux Falls restaurants

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The 2022 Burger Battle generated some serious cash for Sioux Falls restaurants. A new report from Downtown Sioux Falls, Inc., shows restaurants sold more than 44,000 burgers during the month-long promotion in January, generating \$667,231 in revenue. That's up 42% from the 2021 Burger Battle, which saw 31,000 burgers sold, the Argus Leader reported.

Downtown Sioux Falls, Inc., estimates the total economic impact of the 2022 promotion on the community at about \$1.3 million.

The promotion asked burger buyers to score their burgers in five categories, including the patty, the bun, toppings, creativity and customer service. Twenty-seven restaurants competed. Chef Lance's on Phillips won the competition.

Student hits half-court shot to win \$10,000

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A University of South Dakota student has nailed the shot of a lifetime.

The Argus Leader reported that USD student Mary Margaret Borer hit a half-court shot at halftime of South Dakota State's 89-79 win over South Dakota at Sanford Coyote Sports Center on Saturday. The shot won her \$10,000.

Borer started running forward from the three-point line and released the ball several steps over the half-court line. The ball banked off the glass and went in. The crowd erupted with cheers.

Sioux Falls police search for masked hotel robbers

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police in Sioux Falls are searching for two masked men who robbed a hotel.

The Argus Leader reported the men entered the Ramada hotel around 3 a.m. Friday. Police spokesman Sam Clemens said one of the men held the clerk down while the other stole cash. The men fled the scene in a vehicle that was parked outside the hotel.

Clemens said police are reviewing surveillance footage in hopes of tracking down the vehicle and identifying the robbers.

The clerk was unhurt.

European leaders in Moscow, Washington on Ukraine crisis

By SYLVIE CORBET and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — International efforts to defuse the standoff over Ukraine intensified Monday, with French President Emmanuel Macron holding talks in Moscow and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Washington to coordinate policies as fears of a Russian invasion mounted.

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The buildup of an estimated 100,000 Russian troops near Ukraine has fueled Western worries of a possible offensive. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan warned Sunday that Russia could invade Ukraine "any day," triggering a conflict that would come at an "enormous human cost."

Russia has denied any plans to attack its neighbor but demands that the U.S. and its allies bar Ukraine and other former Soviet nations from joining NATO, halt weapons deployments there and roll back NATO forces from Eastern Europe. Washington and NATO reject those demands.

Macron, who is set to meet in the Kremlin with Russian President Vladimir Putin before visiting Ukraine on Tuesday, spoke by phone Sunday with U.S. President Joe Biden to discuss "ongoing diplomatic and deterrence efforts," according to the White House.

"The security and sovereignty of Ukraine or any other European state cannot be a subject for compromise, while it is also legitimate for Russia to pose the question of its own security," Macron said in an interview with French newspaper Journal du Dimanche, adding that he believes that "the geopolitical objective of Russia today is clearly not Ukraine, but to clarify the rules of cohabitation with NATO and the EU."

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, described Macron's visit as "very important," but sought to temper expectations, saying "the situation is too complex to expect a decisive breakthrough after just one meeting."

He noted that "the atmosphere has remained tense," adding that the U.S. and its allies have continued to ignore Moscow's security demands.

Continuing the high-level diplomacy, Scholz is to meet with Biden later Monday in Washington. Scholz is set to travel to Kyiv and Moscow on Feb. 14-15.

Sullivan, the national security adviser, reiterated Sunday that the Russian Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany "will not move forward" if Russia attacks Ukraine.

Biden and Scholz are expected to address the pipeline during their their first face-to-face meeting since Scholz became the head of the German government nearly two months ago.

Ahead of the visit, the White House sought to play down Germany's refusal to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine, bolster its troops in Eastern Europe or spell out which sanctions it would support against Russia — a cautious stand that has drawn criticism abroad and inside Germany.

White House officials, who briefed reporters ahead of the meeting on the condition of anonymity, noted that Germany has been a top contributor of nonmilitary aid to Ukraine and has been supportive of the U.S. decision to bolster its troop presence in Poland and Romania to demonstrate its commitment to NATO.

German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht raised the possibility Sunday that the country could send more troops to Lithuania to reinforce NATO's eastern flank.

Biden has deployed additional U.S. troops to Poland, Romania and Germany, and a few dozen elite U.S. troops and equipment landed Sunday in southeastern Poland near the border with Ukraine, with hundreds more infantry troops of the 82nd Airborne Division set to arrive.

In 2015, France and Germany helped broker a peace deal for eastern Ukraine in a bid to end the conflict between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists that erupted the previous year following the Russian annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

The agreement signed in the Belarusian capital of Minsk helped stop large-scale fighting, but efforts at a political settlement have stalled and frequent skirmishes have continued along the tense line of contact in Ukraine's industrial heartland known as the Donbas.

The leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany last met in Paris in 2019 in the so-called Normandy format summit, but they failed to resolve the main issues.

Amid tensions over the Russian military buildup, presidential advisers from the four countries met in Paris on Jan. 26 this year, but they didn't make any visible progress and agreed to meet again in Berlin in two weeks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pushed for another four-way Normandy summit, but the Kremlin said such meeting would only make sense if the parties agree on the next steps to give special status to the rebel east.

Putin and his officials have urged France, Germany and other Western allies to encourage Ukraine to

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fulfill its obligations under the 2015 agreement, which envisaged a broad autonomy for the Donbas region and a sweeping amnesty for the separatists. The agreement stipulated that only after those conditions are met would Ukraine be able to restore control of its border with Russia in rebel regions.

The Minsk deal was seen by many Ukrainians as a betrayal of national interests, and its implementation has stalled. During the latest tensions, Ukrainian authorities have warned the West against pressuring Ukraine to implement the agreement.

Last week, Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, told The Associated Press that an attempt by Ukraine to fulfil the Minsk deal could trigger internal unrest that would play into Moscow's hand.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the country has received a total of more than 1,000 metric tons of weapons and military supplies from its allies, noting that a series of visits by Western officials has helped deter Russia.

Olympics Live: Papua New Guinea PM tested positive for COVID

BEIJING (AP) — The Latest on the Beijing Winter Olympics:

Papua New Guinea's prime minister tested positive for COVID-19 when he arrived in Beijing last week to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games and had to cut short his stay.

Prime Minister James Marape was immediately given medical treatment, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Monday.

Marape missed Friday's opening ceremony and returned home Sunday night, canceling a planned trip to France. He held a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang via video link while in Beijing, Zhao said.

Marape's present condition was unknown.

Americans Kristen Santos and Maame Biney are out of the women's 500 meters in short track speedskating.

Santos was penalized in her quarterfinal for a lane change that caused contact. Biney didn't finish high enough in her race to move on to the semifinals.

Arianna Fontana of Italy advanced in pursuit of her 10th career medal. The Italian is the most decorated short track skater in Olympic history.

Other big names moving on to the semifinals later Monday night were Kim Boutin of Canada and Suzanne Schulting of the Netherlands.

Denise Herrmann missed only one of 20 shots and skied fast to win Olympic gold in the women's 15-kilometer individual biathlon.

Her win came after a season of mixed results on the World Cup circuit. Her only podium finish was a bronze medal in the individual race early in the season in Oestersund, Sweden.

A former Olympic cross country skier, Herrmann led early and maintained it, completing the course in 44 minutes, 12.7 seconds.

Anais Chevalier-Bouchet of France missed her very last shot, which proved to be a costly mistake, and won silver 9.4 seconds behind Herrmann.

Norway's Marte Olsbu Roiseland, the overall World Cup leader, missed two shots, one prone and one standing, and settled for bronze, 15.3 seconds back.

Ireen Wüst has added to her haul as the most decorated speedskater in Olympic history with another gold.

The 35-year-old Dutch skater won her second straight gold in the 1,500 meters, setting an Olympic record with a time of 1 minute, 53.28 seconds at the Ice Ribbon oval in Beijing.

Miho Takagi of Japan claimed the silver in 1:53.72, while the bronze went to Antoinette de Jong of the Netherlands in 1:54.82.

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It was another Olympic disappointment for Brittany Bowe. The U.S. skater again came up short in the quest for her first individual Olympic medal, fading badly at the end to finish 10th in 1.55.81.

Wüst just keeps getting stronger. She's now won 12 medals over her career, including six golds. That makes her the most decorated athlete in the history of speedskating, as well as her country's most prolific Olympic medalist.

Wüst has medaled in the 1,500 at the last five Olympics. She's won the gold three times, to go along with a silver and a bronze.

Casey Dawson is finally on his way to the Olympics.

The U.S. speedskater tested positive for COVID-19 three weeks ago and had struggled to get the necessary clearance to travel to Beijing. He had to produce four consecutive negative tests, and also dealt with issues over testing centers in Utah that had to be approved by the Chinese consulate.

But Dawson finally resolved those matters and was on a flight to Beijing, according to a tweet Monday from US Speedskating.

Dawson missed the 5,000 meters, and his late arrival will likely keep him out of Tuesday's 1,500 meters. But his main focus was on next week's team pursuit, where he's part of a group that is considered a strong medal contender.

The quarterfinals are next Sunday, with semifinals and the final two days later.

Dawson, a 21-year-old skater from Park City, Utah, has been training at the Utah Olympic Oval to stay sharp while his COVID-19 situation played out. He received his U.S. Olympic clothing and gear this past weekend.

More details have emerged about a delay to an Olympic women's hockey game between Russia and Canada in Beijing.

Canada initially declined to leave the locker room because COVID-19 tests taken earlier in the day by the Russian athletes had not yet been processed.

The International Ice Hockey Federation eventually reached a compromise to have players from both teams wear masks, a first at the Beijing Olympics.

Forward Oxana Bratisheva said through a team translator that the Russian team was initially told the game would be postponed before being told it would proceed an hour late.

The Russian players eventually were allowed to remove their masks at the start of the third period after the test results showed no one was positive.

The Canadians kept their masks on and won 6-1 to improve to 3-0 for the tournament.

Canada was concerned about Russian players who previously tested positive for COVID-19.

Canada held out forward Emily Clark for precautionary reasons after her test result came back inconclusive.

Swedish skier Sara Hector has capped a recent career resurgence in the best way possible, winning the gold medal in the women's giant slalom at the Beijing Olympics. It was her first individual victory at a major championship.

The 29-year-old Hector finished two runs down a course known as The Ice River at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center. Her unofficial combined time was 1 minute, 55.69 seconds.

Federica Brignone of Italy was 0.28 seconds slower over the two legs to add a silver medal to the bronze she won in the giant slalom at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games behind champion Mikaela Shiffrin, who fell during Monday's opening run.

Lara Gut-Behrami of Switzerland was third, 0.72 behind Hector, and now has another bronze to go alongside the one she collected in the downhill at the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

When Hector crossed the line, she raised her ski poles overhead and yelled to celebrate before being embraced by Brignone and Gut-Behrami.

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The skeleton athlete from Belgium whose teary reaction to being placed into virus-related isolation made headlines last week was on the ice Monday for the start of official training.

Kim Meylemans was ninth-fastest out of 24 sliders in one training run, then 18th-fastest in the next.

Meylemans tested positive for COVID-19 after arriving in China, and thought she was going to the Olympic village after returning several negative tests. She was taken to another hotel serving as an isolation facility instead, before officials intervened and got her into the village.

Meylemans is still being tested twice a day and is expected to remain in an isolated wing of the village until the midpoint of this week.

Training for her event continues Tuesday.

China's U.N. ambassador has fired back at his U.S. counterpart over her remarks that sending a member of the Uyghur ethnic group to help deliver the Olympic flame was an attempt to distract from the issue of abuses against Muslim minorities.

Ambassador Zhang Jun issued a statement to "resolutely refute" what he called unfounded accusations against China made by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield in an interview with CNN.

Zhang said China's Winter Olympics team includes 20 athletes from nine ethnic minorities, including Uyghur and Tibetan. China chose cross-country skier Dinigeer Yilamujiang, a Uyghur, as one of two final Olympic torchbearers at the opening ceremony.

"She is the pride and excellent representative of the Chinese people. On what ground does the U.S. has such inexplicable anger over this? And why?" Zhang said.

China has 174 athletes competing in the Games, mainly drawn from the Han majority that makes up more than 90% of the population.

A former U.S. bobsledder's longshot bid to get a spot in the women's bobsled field for the Beijing Games has been denied.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled Monday that Jazmine Fenlator-Victorian of Jamaica should not be awarded a starting position in that event.

Fenlator-Victorian asked CAS to throw out some of the calculations used by the International Bobsled and Skeleton Federation to determine which nations qualified for the event and give Jamaica a spot that allocated to France.

Fenlator-Victorian is still scheduled to compete in the new monobob event. She raced for the U.S. at the 2014 Olympics and competed for Jamaica at the 2018 games.

Canadian snowboarder Max Parrot took home the Olympic gold medal in men's slopestyle just over three years removed from being diagnosed with cancer.

Technically superior on his second of three runs, Parrot scored a 90.96 to hold off the field. He tossed his snowboard in delight after the final score was revealed.

Su Yiming of China earned the silver and Mark McMorris of Canada used a strong final run to bump himself into bronze — his third straight one — and knock defending champion Red Gerard of the United States off the podium.

Olympic organizers say they had a call with athletes Sunday to discuss living conditions at isolation hotels. "We know that that's not easy for anyone in that situation, but particularly an athlete who's gone through the journey to get here," said Kit McConnell, sports director for the International Olympics Committee.

Organizers were not able to immediately say how many athletes are currently in the isolation hotels because they tested positive, but said the numbers have been coming down.

Everyone inside the Olympic bubble is required to take COVID-19 tests. Those who are confirmed positive must go to an isolation facility until they're cleared for discharge, either through negative tests or a review by a panel of medical experts.

The call with athletes came after complaints about inadequate food, small and unclean rooms, and a

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lack of access to training equipment. Over the weekend, organizers said they were addressing the issues and that athletes in isolation would be able to order food from the Olympic Village and have it delivered to their rooms.

As of Monday, organizers say 387 people inside the Olympic bubble have tested positive. The figure includes news media and team officials, not just athletes.

Beat Feuz of Switzerland captured gold in the Olympic men's downhill.

The 41-year-old Johan Clarey of France was 0.10 seconds behind in second and two-time Olympic champion Matthias Mayer of Austria was 0.16 behind in third.

The victory gave Feuz the one thing lacking from a career filled with accomplishments. He won a silver medal in super-G and bronze in downhill at the 2018 Olympics and is the four-time reigning World Cup downhill champion.

The 5-foot-8 (1.72-meter) Feuz is second in this season's downhill standings.

Players for Canada and the Russian team are wearing masks upon returning to the ice for their women's hockey preliminary round game at the Beijing Olympics.

The start of the game was delayed for an hour after the Canadians stayed in their locker room rather than coming out for puck drop. The Russian team eventually returned to its locker room before both teams returned to the ice about 50 minutes after the game was scheduled to start.

The reason behind the delay is unclear, though this is the first game of the Beijing Olympics hockey tournament in which players were required to wear facemasks.

Eileen Gu's goal of three Olympic medals nearly blew off in the wind.

The American-born freestyle skier who spurned Team USA for China ahead of the Beijing Games risked missing the finals in women's big air when she lost a ski on her second run and crashed into do-or-die position entering Round 3.

Gu scaled back her plans in the final round and landed a conservative right-side 900.

Gu said the wind changed direction between her first and second runs. Because she was the fifth of 25 skiers down the jump at Big Air Shougang, she didn't notice the shift until she was mid-air.

She gathered herself for a clean third run and finished fifth, easily into the 12-skier finals.

Canadian Megan Oldham narrowly led France's Tess Ledeux for the top spot after Ledeux topped Oldham for gold at last month's X Games.

American figure skater Vincent Zhou has tested positive as part of regular COVID-19 screening at the Beijing Olympics, one day after struggling through a poor free skate for the eventual team silver medalists.

Zhou is undergoing additional testing Monday to confirm his status. If the results are negative, he will be allowed to compete in the individual competition, which begins with the men's short program on Tuesday.

The high-flying but wildly inconsistent 21-year-old Zhou arrived in Beijing with high hopes of contending for a medal. He finished sixth in the men's program at the Pyeongchang Games, but his second-place finish at the NHK Trophy and victory at Skate American in his two Grand Prix assignments gave him hopes of earning a medal.

He'll get at least one as part of the team silver medalists. He'll await another COVID-19 test to see if he can earn another.

Kamila Valieva became the first woman to land a quad in the Olympics — two of them, in fact — and her historic free skate put a stamp on Russia's dominant run to the gold medal in the team figure skating event at the Beijing Games on Monday.

The 15-year-old Valieva opened with a huge quad salchow and followed with the difficult triple axel before landing another quad, this time a toe loop in combination with a triple toe loop. The only blemish

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on her program came when she fell on her quad toe loop late in the program, but by that point her first gold medal in Beijing was assured.

Valieva scored 178.92 points, giving Russia 74 points and their second gold medal in three editions of the team event. The U.S. took the silver medal after back-to-back bronze, while Japan won its first team medal with bronze.

German skier Dominik Schwaiger has been taken away in a toboggan after falling during the men's downhill at the Beijing Olympics.

He was the second starter and his fall caused a delay in the race.

Schwaiger lost control and fell on his back, then slid down the mountain and grazed the safety nets. He was holding his left arm in apparent pain once he stopped.

The race was postponed from Sunday because of strong winds.

The American ice dance team of Madison Chock and Evan Bates delivered the best free skate of their career during the team competition at the Beijing Games, almost assuring Team USA of its first silver medal in the event.

Russia continues to lead the Americans by a wide margin with only the women's free skate left, but Chock and Bates were able to edge their world champions, Victoria Sinitsina and Nikita Katsalapov, with a score of 129.07 points.

The Russian duo was next with 128.17 while Japan, which was tied with the Americans after the pairs competition, were last among the five ice dance teams. That left the Americans six points behind Russia with 58 but, more importantly, four ahead of the Japanese team entering the final discipline.

Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai has met with International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach in Beijing.

The IOC says the meeting took place over dinner Saturday and IOC member Kirsty Coventry also attended. Coventry and Peng attended the China-Norway mixed curling match that night.

Peng briefly disappeared from public view in November after she accused a Chinese official of sexual assault on her verified Weibo social media. The post was swiftly removed.

Peng told a French newspaper in an interview published Monday that international concern over her well-being is based on "an enormous misunderstanding." She denied having accused the Chinese official of sexual assault.

L'Equipe, which specializes in sports news, published the interview Monday. The publication said it spoke to the tennis player a day earlier in a Beijing hotel in an hour-long interview organized through China's Olympic committee.

The newspaper said it had to submit questions in advance and that a Chinese Olympic committee official sat in on the discussion and translated her comments from Chinese.

The Russians have solidified their hold on the team figure skating gold medal, despite an unexpected fall by their pairs duo of Anastasia Mishina and Aleksander Galliamov, with two disciplines remaining at Capital Indoor Arena.

Mishina and Galliamov's score of 145.20 points gave their team the maximum 10 points, while a disappointing program by the American duo of Alexa Knierim and Brandon Frazier left a dead heat for the silver medal.

Knierim did a single toe loop instead of the planned double during their opening combination, then put her hand down on a triple salchow and stepped out on their throw triple flip. That was enough to give the Americans just six points, while Japan got a strong program from Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara to pull even with Team USA in second place.

Up later Monday are the free dance, followed by the concluding women's free skate.

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NBC primetime Olympics host Mike Tirico will have a shorter stay in Beijing than originally planned.

Tirico's final show from Beijing will be Monday night. He will fly from China to NBC Sports headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, to host on Wednesday and Thursday before heading to Los Angeles Friday to anchor Olympics and Super Bowl coverage through Sunday.

Tirico will then head back to Stamford for the final week of Olympics coverage. The Games end on Feb. 20.

Maria Taylor, who signed with NBC on the eve of last July's Tokyo Olympics, will host Tuesday night's show while Tirico is flying back.

Tirico was originally slated to stay in Beijing through Thursday before going to Los Angeles. NBC officials though have reiterated that Tirico's schedule was subject to change based on COVID-19 and other factors.

NBC said in January that it would not send its announcers and most hosts to the Beijing Olympics due to continued concerns about rising COVID-19 cases worldwide and China's strict policy about those who test positive.

Defending Olympic champion Mikaela Shiffrin has missed a gate early in the first run of the giant slalom at the Beijing Games on Monday and been disqualified from the event.

Coming around a left-turn gate, she lost control, slid and fell on her side.

The 26-year-old Shiffrin is trying to become the first Alpine ski racer from the United States to win three Olympic golds across a career.

She arrived in China as one of the most-watched athletes in any sport at the Winter Olympics, a superstar who has dominated ski racing for long stretches in recent years. She has said she hoped to enter all five individual events at Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center.

Her next race is the slalom on Wednesday. Shiffrin won that at age 18 at the 2014 Sochi Games.

Spotify CEO says canceling Joe Rogan isn't 'the answer'

By TOM KRISHER and LINDSEY BAHR Associated Press

Joe Rogan has put Spotify in a tough spot, but the streaming giant is not ready to part ways with the popular podcast host despite intense criticism over his anti-coronavirus vaccine comments and use of racial slurs.

Spotify CEO Daniel Ek also said in a message to employees Sunday that Rogan's racist language was "incredibly hurtful" and that the host was behind the removal of dozens of episodes of "The Joe Rogan Experience."

"While I strongly condemn what Joe has said and I agree with his decision to remove past episodes from our platform, I realize some will want more," Ek said in the note. "And I want to make one point very clear — I do not believe that silencing Joe is the answer."

The letter is the clearest indication yet of where Spotify stands on Rogan's fate with the company as some musicians, including Neil Young, Janis Joplin and India.Arie, have pulled their work from the streaming service in protest and others could follow. Spotify reportedly paid \$100 million to exclusively host Rogan's podcast, which now threatens the bottom line but is also a key part of the company's strategy to be a one-stop shop for audio.

"We should have clear lines around content and take action when they are crossed, but canceling voices is a slippery slope. Looking at the issue more broadly, it's critical thinking and open debate that powers real and necessary progress," Ek wrote.

He said he was "deeply sorry" for the impact the controversy was having on Spotify's employees. Rogan apologized Saturday for his use of the N-word on some past episodes.

Spotify's move likely won't sit well with one side of an increasingly polarized country where there are heightened sensitivities on race and vaccine misinformation, experts say.

"If Spotify says, 'We can't drop him. He has the right to say what he wants,' that continues on the line where there is this implicit support to say racist things on these platforms," Adia Harvey Wingfield, a so-

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ciology professor at Washington University in St. Louis, said before Ek's letter was released.

The streaming site also has to decide whether offensive words are allowable elsewhere on its app, where songs with racist, homophobic and anti-immigrant messages are available, said John Wihbey, a Northeastern University professor and specialist in emerging technologies.

"There's some real self-examination to be doing beyond Joe," Wihbey said Sunday. "This is a big moment of reckoning for entertainment and streaming platforms to see where the window is, what's over the line."

In his letter, Ek announced an investment of \$100 million to license, develop and market "music and audio content from historically marginalized groups," without giving more details.

Rogan's public troubles started on Jan. 24 when Young asked to have his music removed over concerns Rogan was promoting skepticism about the COVID-19 vaccines. Other artists followed suit, including Joni Mitchell and Roxane Gay.

Spotify said it would soon add a warning to all podcasts that discuss COVID-19, directing listeners to factual, up-to-date information from scientists and public health experts.

The scrutiny intensified when a video compilation emerged last week showing Rogan repeatedly using the N-word. Arie posted it on her Instagram account, using the hashtag #DeleteSpotify.

"They take this money that's built from streaming, and they pay this guy \$100 million, but they pay us like .003% of a penny," the Grammy winner wrote. "I don't want to generate money that pays that."

Rogan apologized in an Instagram video Saturday, saying that the slurs were the "most regretful and shameful thing" he has ever had to address and that he hasn't used the N-word in years.

Ek told The Wall Street Journal last week that he took responsibility for being "too slow to respond" to the criticism over vaccine misinformation. It took the company five days to respond publicly to Young.

"It's become clear to me that we have an obligation to do more to provide balance and access to widely accepted information from the medical and scientific communities guiding us through this unprecedented time," Ek continued in a statement.

Rogan is an odd mix of shock jock and host who leads discussions of public policy, arts and culture, Wihbey said, describing his brand as conservative "bro America."

His comments were clearly racist, Wihbey said, but he hopes that Rogan will see this as a chance to substantively discuss race and vaccine issues in future episodes. His audience may not hear the discussions otherwise, Wihbey said.

"I do think that assembling this kind of audience is important," he said. "He can say things that I think can move the needle."

Wingfield said the controversy could be positive if it starts a shift to discussions of racial stereotypes.

"I think that if Joe Rogan kind of learns from this experience and becomes a driving voice for that conversation, that could be really valuable," she said. "But I want to stress again that that's a pretty big if, and I don't know if it will come to that."

Spotify reports having 406 million active monthly users, up nearly 20% from last year, and advertising has grown largely because of podcasts. Musicians still generate the bulk of Spotify's profits, experts say. The company had 31% of the 524 million music streaming subscriptions worldwide in the second quarter of 2021, more than double that of second-place Apple Music, according to Midia Research.

Spotify Technology's share price fell 0.5% early Monday in after-hours trading. It jumped 9.2% on Friday.

Biden task force releases report to strengthen labor unions

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

A Biden administration task force on organized labor on Monday issued a set of recommendations that could make it easier for federal workers and contractors to unionize.

The report submitted to President Joe Biden included 70 distinct policy proposals, according to a release by the White House. Biden created the task force chaired by Vice President Kamala Harris, with Labor Secretary Marty Walsh as vice chair, through an executive order last April.

The report argues that a decades-long drop in union membership has coincided with a rising share of

income going to the top 10% of earners. It further says that most Americans have a favorable impression of unions and would join one if given the option in a vote. Yet the Labor Department reported last month that only 10.3% of workers belonged to a union in 2021, down from 20.1% in 1983.

Many of the proposals to increase unionization are specific directions focused on the federal government as an employer. The Interior Department is among four agencies that will now let union organizers talk with employees on federal property, a rule that applies to private-sector employees on contract with the government.

The departments of Transportation and Commerce will set preferences and guidelines for federal grants to foster union jobs.

There will be a ban on federal contract dollars going to anti-union activities by the Defense, Health and Human Services and Labor departments as well as the Office of Management and Budget.

Other proposals include efforts to improve workers' awareness of their rights and to enforce existing labor laws. The task force plans to submit a follow-up report in six months to describe how agencies are implementing the policies and to issue new recommendations.

Peng Shuai saga hews to familiar script in China

By SARAH DiLORENZO Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The drama surrounding Peng Shuai is following a familiar script, in which someone who has run afoul of China's Communist government disappears from view.

What happens next depends on the case, but it is not uncommon for the person in question to disavow the statements or actions that first upset officials. Other times, the person simply keeps a lower profile. Sometimes, their arrest is eventually announced.

Peng's saga began in November, when she wrote in a social media post that a former member of the party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee had forced her to have sex three years ago despite repeated refusals. Her post also said they had sex once seven years ago, and she had feelings for him after that.

The post was quickly taken down and the former top-ranked doubles player dropped out of public view late last year.

After she reappeared weeks later, she denied to a Singapore newspaper that she ever made any accusation of sexual assault. In an interview published Monday by a French sports paper, she called the whole situation an "enormous misunderstanding."

Here's a look at some other people who have disappeared over the years — a phenomenon that has expanded since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2013:

JACK MA

Among the most high-profile recent disappearances was that of Ma, the founder of Alibaba Group, the world's biggest e-commerce company.

Ma, China's most prominent entrepreneur, stopped appearing in public after he criticized regulators as being too conservative in an October 2020 speech.

Days later, the government ordered Ma's Ant Group, a financial service that grew out of Alibaba's online payments business, to suspend a planned stock market debut in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Rumors on social media questioned whether Ma had been detained. Friends of Ma reportedly said he wasn't in custody but decided to stay quiet following criticism of his comments. The normally voluble Ma reappeared two months later, in a brief video in January 2021 that made no mention of his absence.

Since then, sightings of Ma, who is officially retired, have been rare. His whereabouts and legal status remain shrouded in mystery.

FAN BINGBING

Fan is one of China's biggest — and biggest-grossing — movie stars. Her star was riding high when she

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disappeared for about four months in 2018: Her Weibo social media account fell silent, and her management office in Beijing was vacated.

When she finally resurfaced, it was to apologize for tax evasion.

State news agency Xinhua reported that Fan and the companies she represents had been ordered to pay taxes and penalties totaling 900 million yuan (\$130 million).

Fan, who had roles in Iron Man 3 and X-Men: Days of Future Past, has managed to revive her film career, to a degree, with roles in international productions. While her case was not overtly political, it came amid a sweeping campaign against corruption waged by Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

MENG HONGWEI

Meng, a vice minister of public security and head of Interpol, the France-based organization that facilitates police cooperation across borders, went missing for weeks in 2018.

Chinese authorities soon announced he was being investigated for taking bribes and other crimes. That signaled he was the latest high-ranking Chinese official caught in Xi's anti-corruption campaign — a measure that made the Chinese leader popular but has also been criticized as cover for eliminating political rivals.

Meng was eventually tried and remains imprisoned. His wife Grace Meng has long maintained that the accusations were trumped up and that he was purged because he'd been using his high-profile position to push for change.

LIU XIAOBO

Liu, a dissident writer who joined calls for increased freedoms in China in 2008, was detained a day before the appeal for reforms was released. After his arrest, his whereabouts were unknown for a time.

He was eventually accused of subversion and sentenced to 11 years in prison. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and died of cancer before he was ever released. Liu had long been a critic of China's government and had previously spent time in jail for joining the 1989 student-led protests in Tiananmen Square that were crushed in a military crackdown.

WHAT OTHER KINDS OF PEOPLE DISAPPEAR?

Most notably in recent years, large numbers of Uyghurs and members of other predominantly Muslim minority groups have disappeared as part of what the government calls a campaign against extremism, separatism and terrorism.

An estimated 1 million men and women or more were forced into prison-like political re-education camps officially described as de-radicalization bases and job training centers.

China has also grabbed some foreigners.

Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor were detained in China in December 2018, shortly after Canada arrested Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei, on a U.S. extradition request.

China delayed announcing their detentions for days, then denied that the arrests were linked while insisting at the same time that Meng be set free. The two were released in September after Meng, no relation to the Interpol chief, was allowed to return to China in what was essentially a high-level prisoner swap.

Bubble life: China takes COVID sports routine to new extreme

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Officially, the Beijing Olympics are taking place inside what organizers are calling "the enclosed compound activity area."

That's a fancy way of saying "a closed loop."

You probably know it better as "the bubble."

And bubbles are now part of the norm at major sporting events.

The premise of this bubble is simple: Keep those who passed multiple tests just to get access to the

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Olympics in, keep the rest of the world — and, hopefully, COVID-19 — out. It has worked for the National Basketball Association, the National Hockey League, Major League Baseball, Grand Slam tennis events, college sports, the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics that took place last summer and so much more.

Everyone inside the bubble is, in theory, virus-free when they get in and figure to have a chance to stay that way if the strict rules are followed. For a few, it hasn't gone to plan. Their Olympics ended before they could begin after a positive test. For most, it is working.

And for everyone, it is daunting.

"Everyone's road to Beijing has been anything but ordinary," U.S. speedskater Brittany Bowe said.

The road after they get to Beijing is anything but ordinary as well.

The venues are open to members of the Olympic family, while the rest of Beijing is basically closed. The Forbidden City is, well, forbidden. The Great Wall is sometimes seen but cannot be climbed. The arrivals section of the usually bustling Beijing Capital International Airport was a ghost town, sans for those in full protective equipment tasked with administering coronavirus tests and directing visitors to the proper bus.

Olympic hotels are surrounded by fences; police and guards are the only ones that open and close the gates for buses and other approved vehicles. When media centers at each venue close for the day, surfaces are sprayed with disinfectant and tested for the presence of virus. There's no going for a walk around town, no shopping expeditions, no visits to local restaurants. And in case anyone forgets where they are and what the rules are, there are massive signs at just about every imaginable exit: "Please Stay Within The Enclosed Compound Activity Area."

"It's Olympics without friends and family, which is the hardest part," USA Luge slider Emily Sweeney said. "I was talking with one of the Latvians and saying, 'We're going a little crazy in the head because of COVID,' but we both agreed, it's just so important right now. I'll be able to take a breath afterward. It's a bubble ... but the term 'bubble' and the fact that we're always being tested just keeps me on alert."

An Italian luge athlete, Kevin Fischnaller, tested positive two days before he was to compete at the Olympics and was removed from the village; his cousin, Dominik Fischnaller, wound up winning a bronze medal. U.S. bobsledder Elana Meyers Taylor missed unofficial training last week — and a chance to carry the American flag into the opening ceremony — because she was in isolation following a positive test; she's now cleared and plans to be able to compete in her two events.

"I'm still scared to take off my mask," U.S. curler Vicky Persinger said. "I've had the fear ingrained in me for several months now. But everything is so safe here. They've done a great job with all the testing."

Ah, the testing.

It is a daily requirement — sometimes more. Some members of the Olympic family were told on Sunday that if they had recently visited one of the alpine skiing venues, they would need a second PCR test that day instead of just one. The bubble, despite the efforts of most everyone in it, is not airtight.

Double Olympic champion Simen Hegstad Kruger of Norway, one of the best cross-country skiers in the world, was unable to defend his title in the 30-kilometer skiathlon earlier this week. He tested positive before even coming to China, meaning he couldn't even get into the bubble.

"The games should be the pinnacle of the sport, and you should have all the best athletes here in their top form," British skier Andrew Musgrave said. "If you become an Olympic champion, you want it to be because you're a worthy champion, not because your competitors aren't here."

Most Olympians will be in the bubble for no more than a couple weeks. They will not even come close to a record for bubble longevity.

When the Los Angeles Lakers and Miami Heat advanced to the 2020 NBA Finals at that league's restart bubble at Walt Disney World near Orlando, Florida, they both logged more than 90 days separated from the outside world. No fans, no family, just FaceTime and multiple Amazon deliveries a day (some players bought everything from furniture to wine refrigerators for their NBA bubble stay, most of those purchases being left behind).

Much like this bubble, masks and testing were the rule inside the NBA's bubble. But this Olympic bubble has taken safety to a higher level than even the NBA did, especially given China's zero-tolerance policy

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for positive tests.

"Very challenging and difficult," Lakers star LeBron James said of his time in the bubble. "It played with your mind. It played with your body. You're away from some of the things that you're so accustomed to, to make you be the professional that you are."

He persevered and held a gold trophy aloft when his bubble stay was over.

Here, those who handle it best will hoist gold medals.

"This is a really challenging thing that we're choosing to do," Sweeney said. "I would say going to Beijing and getting a little glimpse of the culture, but not really being able to experience on any of it, that's just sad. It's sad to know that we're having Olympics in a place that could be really cool to see a completely different culture ... and we can't see it.

"But is it worth it? Absolutely."

A muted Lunar New Year, inside and outside Olympic bubble

By SALLY HO and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's capital city returned to work Monday after a weeklong Lunar New Year holiday that was muted by the pandemic — especially for the thousands of people inside the Winter Olympics bubble.

For volunteers and competitors at the Games, there's no hong bao — red envelopes — with gifts of cash, no lucky tang yuan rice cakes with sesame filling, no dramatically-choreographed lion dance.

"I really wish that we could gather outside and watch some fireworks or something but due to the pandemic, we can't really gather and do that stuff unfortunately," said Vincent Zhou, a Chinese-American figure skater with deep ties to Beijing.

Across China, the pandemic has meant a subdued Lunar New Year for the third year in a row. The government discouraged residents of the capital from traveling home to visit family to limit the spread of the virus. Those who did needed two negative virus tests before heading back to Beijing and a third test within 72 hours of returning.

Jing Kefei, a 28-year-old webpage designer, said he had just taken the third test before heading back to work. The Beijing subway was crowded again and the roads congested with commuters.

"It's the same as normal working days, except that we were ordered to take the nucleic acid test," he said.

Also known as the Spring Festival, the new year's holiday that fell on February 1 this year is the most important in China. Locally, it is faithfully celebrated with a singular focus of spending time with family for a week, though the celebration actually lasts most of the month, including the traditional Lantern Festival on February 15.

Chinese New Year is framed around one of the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. This year is the Year of the Tiger, an especially lucky animal in Chinese culture.

"My mom is the Year of the Tiger, so it's very cool to just experience Chinese New Year here," said Madison Chock, a Chinese-Hawaiian figure skater on the U.S. team.

The grandest display of the Chinese New Year revelry happened at the Opening Ceremony on Friday, when fireworks dotted the sky above the Bird's Nest stadium, small cheerful children wearing Tiger hats did musical numbers, and other locals danced for hours to celebratory Chinese pop music as thousands of Olympic athletes took their turn in the parade.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach noted the ceremony's theme in his address at the Opening Ceremony, typically the most watched event of the Olympics.

"May this encourage you to go faster, to aim higher, to become stronger — together. In this way you will inspire the world in this Olympic Year with the same ambition, courage and strength like the Year of the Tiger," Bach said in a message to the athletes.

It's clear the pandemic has complicated what grand celebrations may have been.

Xiang (Robert) Li, director of Temple University's U.S.-Asia Center for Tourism and Hospitality Research, said the COVID-19 restrictions have hampered what could have been an extraordinary cultural tourism opportunity for overseas visitors here for the Olympics.

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"Having the Winter Olympics to coincide with this actually gives China something to promote to help understand its culture. Unfortunately, the pandemic doesn't help and the closed loop doesn't help," Li said. "Traveling during the pandemic, everything is against a very different backdrop."

The Lunar New Year usually marks China's busiest travel season. This year, China's Ministry of Transport expects 1.2 billion trips to be made, a 35% increase from last year but lower than the 3 billion trips taken before the pandemic in 2019.

Wearing a red scarf, 49-year-old Chai Xiaoping arrived in Beijing on Sunday morning from the nearby port city of Tianjin after an anticlimactic holiday.

"In the past, my home was more lively and more festive with the family gathering for a reunion. But this year ... we were separated into several clusters," said Chai, "The pandemic messed it all up."

Even without the pandemic, the festival has become less boisterous over recent years amid fireworks bans, a campaign against food waste and concerns among Communist Party members that conspicuous consumption could draw the attention of anti-corruption commissioners. In recent years, Chinese people had increasingly taken advantage of the holiday to travel abroad, although quarantine restrictions have since led many to stay home.

In a normal year, the domestic travel associated with Lunar New Year creates the largest human migration in a single turn, but inbound travel from overseas visitors isn't an especially established tourism phenomenon, Li said.

A China visit for outsiders during Chinese New Year – a holiday that revolves around family – Li likened it to a foreigner visiting Thanksgiving in America with no family home to visit for the turkey dinner.

For Zhou, the figure skater, the fact that Beijing is like a second hometown to him with his grandparents and much of his extended family just down the road, it's a missed opportunity to celebrate with them.

"The volunteers were very festive. They all said 'Happy New Year' – or 'xīnnián kuài lè' – to all of us," Zhou said. "They had brought in hotpot and Beijing Kǎoyā (Peking duck), so I had some of that, and I mean, the food's been pretty good."

Across Asia, spike in virus cases follows Lunar New Year

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — Many Asian countries are facing a spike in COVID-19 infections after the widely-celebrated Lunar New Year holidays, as health officials grapple with the highly-transmissible omicron variant and expectations that numbers will continue to rise in coming weeks.

The Lunar New Year, which is China's biggest holiday, was celebrated across Asia on Feb. 1 even as pandemic restrictions in many countries kept crowds and family outings to a minimum.

Hong Kong's authorities are confronting record cases that are straining its so-called "zero-COVID" policy. On Monday, the city reported a new high of 614 local infections.

"We expect there will be more cases coming in a few days. We consider this as some effects after the holiday events and clusters," told reporters on Monday Edwin Tsui, an official with the Centre for Health Protection.

"With our current containment measures, we hope we can still contain the disease."

Hong Kong currently requires all cases to be hospitalized. On Monday, authorities announced that close contacts of infected persons will be allowed to isolate at home, starting from Tuesday. Those who test positive while in home isolation will be transferred to a hospital.

Hong Kong has aligned itself with China's "zero-COVID" policy that aims to totally stamp out outbreaks, even as many other countries change their approach to living with the virus. Authorities look to impose lockdowns on residential buildings wherever clusters of infections are identified, and have banned public dining after 6 p.m.

In Singapore, a dramatic rise in coronavirus infections followed last week's holiday, with cases tripling to 13,000 on Friday.

Daily infections have since dipped to 7,752 on Sunday, amid restrictions that include limited capacity for

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restaurants and capping the number of unique visitors to each household.

Singapore has reported over 100,000 cases spanning the last month, although over 99% of the cases are mild or asymptomatic.

Across Asia, authorities are confronting a similar pattern as the more easily transmissible omicron becomes dominant, even as health officials in several countries report that omicron surges are not driving hospitalizations or deaths as high as the previous delta variant.

In Japan, nearly 90,000 new cases nationwide were reported on Sunday, including 17,526 in Tokyo, as local omicron infections showed no signs of slowing.

Experts say the infections are now spreading to vulnerable elderly people who are beginning to fill more hospital beds. Less than 5% of the country's population has received their third dose of the coronavirus vaccine.

Local outbreak numbers are similarly rising in Indonesia, edging toward the caseloads that marked the height of last year's devastating delta outbreak.

On Jan. 6, Indonesia recorded 533 new COVID-19 cases and seven deaths. A month later on Sunday, the daily figure had soared to 36,057. Daily deaths have also climbed to 57, almost four times the rate a week ago.

In Thailand, officials on Monday reported more than 10,000 daily cases for the third day in a row, but the Department of Disease Control said that the number of severely ill patients was dropping, while the fatality rate has remained stable.

Department chief Opas Karnkawinpong said that Thailand might consider relaxing some of the country's pandemic restrictions, as the omicron variant seemed to be less severe.

"The global situation of COVID-19 seems to be moving in the same direction," he was quoted as saying in The Bangkok Post. "Many countries have started to ease measures despite spikes in daily infections."

In other countries where the Lunar New Year is a major holiday, governments are likewise on high alert ahead of expectations that omicron will continue to stoke higher infections.

New cases in Malaysia have been hovering higher, with the health ministry reporting 11,034 on Monday. The rise came after the Lunar New Year when many Malaysians travel, but health officials said most of the cases were asymptomatic or have light symptoms.

Top health official Noor Hisham Abdullah has warned that daily cases could double by the end of March and urged Malaysians to take their booster dose. Some 98% of adults in the country have completed their vaccination and half of them have received their third jab.

In South Korea, health experts warn that the country may see daily jumps of 130,000 or 170,000 by late February.

The country reported 38,691 new cases of the virus, a nine-fold increase from the levels seen in mid-January, when omicron became the country's dominant strain.

In Vietnam, authorities have warned that infections may rise after the popular new year holiday.

Vietnam reported 192 cases of the omicron variant in the past month, with most of those showing only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. With low hospitalization and death rates, Vietnam had previously moved toward resuming most social activities.

The Philippines has moved to ease coronavirus restrictions and open its doors to tourists as outbreak numbers eased to about 8,300 on Sunday, down from a peak of 39,000 in mid-January.

But social distancing restrictions remain in place amid fears of an outbreak ahead of the country's presidential and general elections May 9. Campaigning begins on Tuesday, with a ban in place on handshakes, kissing, hugging and large crowds.

In mainland China, new local infections continue to fluctuate, falling as low as nine on Friday, but rising again to 45 on Monday, most of them in the southern region of Guangxi.

Recent cases have included a handful of omicron infections, though such outbreaks have been tightly contained. Chinese authorities have imposed strict local lock downs and mass testing, as the country kicked off the Beijing Winter Olympics last week.

Meanwhile, the far-flung Pacific archipelago nation of Tonga has been trying to contain its first outbreak since the start of the global pandemic, which might have been brought in with the delivery of emergency medical supplies and water after last month's volcanic eruption and tsunami.

Two Tongan men who worked handling shipments tested positive last week. Over the weekend, Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni said two more positive cases were confirmed, bringing the total of active cases to seven.

Shiffrin's fall in Olympic giant slalom will stick with her

By ANDREW DAMPF AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Mikaela Shiffrin will not soon forget what happened Monday in her first race of the Beijing Olympics. The poor transition that came five turns, and about 10 seconds, into the defense of her 2018 gold medal in the giant slalom. The skidding slide onto her left side. The missed gate that meant she was done so early in the opening run of a two-leg event.

The first "DNF" — "Did Not Finish" — next to her name on any GS result sheet in more than four years, a streak encompassing 30 races.

It's not simply about how rare these mistakes are. It's about the sting that sticks with her.

"I won't ever get over this," Shiffrin said, her voice steady, after slowly making her way to the bottom of a course known as The Ice River at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center. "I've never gotten over any."

That's what happens when an athlete is as successful as Shiffrin, a 26-year-old American who owns three Winter Games medals — including a pair of golds — along with three World Cup overall titles and six world championship victories.

The misses stand out.

She spoke about "how much it hurt" and how "heartbreaking" it was when she failed to complete a giant slalom on Jan. 23, 2018, in the Kronplatz World Cup stop at San Vigilio di Marebbe, Italy — the last time she didn't complete a GS, which came three weeks before she won the gold at the Pyeongchang Games. She mentioned, too, a slalom error before those same Olympics. And a flub six years ago in another race.

"That's what drives me to try to keep working and improving, so I can try to make it (so) those things don't happen. But sometimes they still do happen and, unfortunately, it happened today," said Shiffrin, who plans to be out there again Wednesday in the slalom, a race she won at age 18 at the 2014 Sochi Games. "I felt like there was a lot to look forward to, but, well, now we need to reset."

The giant slalom was the first women's Alpine race on the schedule in Beijing — Shiffrin intends to enter all five — and she was hardly the only racer to encounter trouble. The second run went on without her; in all, 19 of the 80 first-run starters failed to finish.

Sara Hector of Sweden — who leads the GS standings this season — continued her recent run of success with the biggest win of her career later Monday, taking the gold with a two-run time of 1 minute, 55.69 seconds.

Federica Brignone of Italy added a silver medal to the bronze she claimed behind Shiffrin four years ago. Lara Gut-Behrami of Switzerland was third for her second Olympic bronze.

"It's not easy, but I like when it's not easy," Brignone said about the course conditions. "It's not easy, because when you push too much, you slide. When you don't push, you slide."

Marta Bassino of Italy, who won the World Cup giant slalom title last season and went two spots earlier than Shiffrin on Monday, fell on her left hip, slid down and spun around.

Shiffrin, who is from Colorado, was the seventh racer out of the start gate, lost control coming around a left-turn and later blamed "trying to push it," describing her skiing as "almost anxious."

She tried to right herself but could not.

Eventually, she propped herself up, stopped on the side of slope, stuck her poles in the snow and put her hands on her hips.

"It's hard to know," she said later, "how it would have gone the rest of the run. ... It's like, 'Well, yeah, the day was finished, basically, before it even started.'"

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Shiffrin is as precise a skier as there is, someone who prides herself on making sure she gets all the way down the course, pushing just the right amount to be faster than everyone else while staying upright — no easy task while sending yourself down the icy side of a mountain.

"That's the brutality of the sport: You can be as prepared as you want to and you still ski out in the fourth gate or the seventh gate or the 10th gate," said Norwegian rival Ragnhild Mowinckel, who was fifth Monday after getting the GS silver in 2018. "Anyhow, I think (Shiffrin) will rise up again and she will probably nail the slalom and the other disciplines."

After her tumble, Shiffrin spoke to her boyfriend, Norwegian skier Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, who finished fifth Monday in the men's downhill won by Beat Feuz of Switzerland.

"Of course it's a pity to ski out early in the race, but that's also part of the game," Kilde said. "She tried and she went for it 100%."

Shiffrin speaks honestly and openly about the pressure created by the weight of expectations — her own, of course, and those of fans, but also coaches, friends and family. She is upfront about the burden of dealing with the accidental death of her father, Jeff, two years ago.

Not long after Shiffrin's competitive day was done far sooner than expected, she got a hug from her mother, Eileen, who serves as one of her coaches, then headed back out to do some training for the slalom.

Shiffrin still should have a handful of chances over the next two weeks to become the first Alpine ski racer from the United States to win three Olympic golds across a career.

"I'm not going to cry about this," she said Monday, "because that's just wasting energy."

BEIJING SNAPSHOT: A scramble for scarce Olympic souvenirs

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The race is on to snap up scarce 2022 Winter Olympic souvenirs, especially stuffed versions of Games mascot Bing Dwen Dwen, a panda in a winter coat.

People showed up with stools Sunday to wait overnight in freezing temperatures outside Gongmei Emporium on the Wangfujing pedestrian mall in central Beijing. Some were from a mini-industry who are paid to stand in line to buy the latest smartphones and other consumer crazes for clients.

The pandas were sold out Monday at many locations, including at the Olympics facilities, where Chinese volunteers and foreign visitors lined up for hours.

Gongmei sold out of Bing Dwen Dwen toys in 30 minutes, said one woman who would give only her surname, Dong. She said she arrived 30 minutes before the store opened but failed to get one.

A sign in Gongmei's window said it had 300 Bing Dwen Dwen figures and buyers were allowed one each. It promised more Tuesday.

In the Houhai neighborhood north of the Chinese capital's center, a shop hung out a sign before 10 a.m. saying Bing Dwen Dwen souvenirs were sold out.

The Beijing Olympic organizing committee asked souvenir factories to make more, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. Many reopened this week after shutting down for two weeks or more during the Lunar New Year holiday.

Dong said she and three family members would take turns waiting in line through the night for Gongmei to open Tuesday.

At mid-afternoon, about 40 customers already were in line. Employees with bullhorns urged them not to stay overnight, when temperatures were forecast to fall to minus-6 degrees C (21 degrees F).

Gongmei's Wangfujing flagship sold Olympics merchandise worth 3 million yuan (\$470,000) on Friday, the day of the opening ceremony, the official newspaper Global Times reported.

Wang Qianliang, 60, and his wife, visiting from Xi'an in western China, waited for two hours but failed to get a Bing Dwen Dwen. Wang said he would come back Tuesday.

"My child really wants to have one," Wang said.

Closed steel mill sends Olympic skiers - not smoke - skyward

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By JAKE SEINER AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Alex Hall is accustomed to a grand mountain vista. The American freestyle skier could get used to the view atop Big Air Shougang, though.

"The like, crazy smokestack things in the back are pretty cool," he said. "You get to see some of the mountains in the background, you got this temple here, the city's that way, the steel factory. You get to see a lot of stuff."

Anytime he and his fellow big air competitors come back to China, plenty of people will get to see them, too.

Freeski big air opened its Olympic competition Monday at the world's first permanent, city-based big air facility, a repurposed steel mill on the west side of Beijing that's made a stunning backdrop for one of the Games' newest sports. Freeskiing is taking on big air for the first time as a Winter Games discipline, while the snowboarders will be here next week after debuting the event in Pyeongchang four years ago.

The 200-foot big air structure was built on the site of the former Shougang Group steel mill, China's first state-owned plant that helped the country become a world leader in steel production. Its billowing smokestacks provided work for thousands but also darkened the sky over Beijing's Shijingshan District, contributing to the city's air pollution problem.

China closed the factory in conjunction with the 2008 Summer Games, seeking to clean up its image, well as its air.

The sprawling campus has been converted into bizarre, yet beautiful, city oasis.

Rusting factories and machinery remain, but the space between has been filled by grassy lawns, glassy ponds and a good deal of greenery. One of the blast furnaces was given a face lift and turned into a steampunk-style event space with shops, commercial offices and a museum. The yards host dance showcases in the summer, and architects plan to transform one of the massive cooling towers hovering over the big air jump into a wedding venue.

"This feels like it was created in a virtual world, in a video game," American freeskiier Nick Goepper said.

It's also central to China's efforts to encourage 300 million people to participate in winter sports in conjunction with these Games. Facilities were carved into the complex's infrastructure to help Chinese athletes train in short track speedskating, figure skating, ice hockey and curling. The Beijing Organizing Committee is even based out of the park's offices.

The eye-catcher, though, is big air.

The discipline is a sort of high-risk home run derby for snowboarding and freestyle skiing, taking one element of the sport and pushing it to its extreme. Because the jumps span only a couple of hundred feet — compared to several thousand on slopestyle courses — they're a strong fit for live audiences.

Even better, you don't need a mountain to put on a big air event. Temporary jumps have been erected at Boston's Fenway Park and Atlanta's Truist Park in recent years, bringing the mountain sport to metropolitan areas instead of asking the masses to trek up to ski and snowboarding's native slopes.

"When we went to Atlanta, lots of those people don't get to see snow that often," American snowboarder Chris Corning said. "I'm not sure they have snowplows there."

The freeskiers have noticed an enormous uptick in quality at the permanent Big Air Shougang. As American Colby Stevenson said, scaffolding jumps like the one in Atlanta can be "pretty sketchy."

"It's a little bit scary just because you can like, feel it out there swaying," teammate Mac Forehand said.

With narrow runways and shorter, flatter landings, those temporary setups aren't conducive to going big. The spacious Shougang setup doesn't have those restrictions.

"It feels like we're up in the mountains," Swedish freeskiier Oliwer Magnusson said.

That's shown during practice runs, when several skiers have thrown down previously unfinished tricks. The men's freeskiers expect their rivals to break new ground in the finals Wednesday, and that's only possible because of the jump's quality.

It has athletes drooling over the possibility of other permanent venues cropping up elsewhere, but it's not clear that's going to happen. China invested aggressively in its push to get citizens involved in winter

sports, which is what made Big Air Shougang possible.

"I think that the direction is the correct one to be going in," said American-born Eileen Gu, who is competing for China in part because she wants to inspire Chinese girls to take up skiing.

Such a venue might not get enough use to justify in another city, though. The Shougang jump was laid out so the seats can also be used for concerts and shows in summer, but the ramp itself has limited utility. After all, there are only so many skiers and snowboarders who can handle being thrust 20-plus feet in the air.

"If something like this was sustainable enough to repeat all over the world, I think that would be super-duper cool," Goepper said. "This just brings the sport closer to the public."

Either way, there's appreciation for the peculiarity of what's happening here, where the yards that once poured pillars of black smoke into smoggy Beijing are shooting Olympians skyward instead.

"One of the coolest things I've gotten to see," Forehand said.

Israeli, Palestinian figures propose 2-state confederation

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli and Palestinian public figures have drawn up a new proposal for a two-state confederation that they hope will offer a way forward after a decade-long stalemate in Mideast peace efforts.

The plan includes several controversial proposals, and it's unclear if it has any support among leaders on either side. But it could help shape the debate over the conflict and will be presented to a senior U.S. official and the U.N. secretary general this week.

The plan calls for an independent state of Palestine in most of the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel and Palestine would have separate governments but coordinate at a very high level on security, infrastructure and other issues that affect both populations.

The plan would allow the nearly 500,000 Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank to remain there, with large settlements near the border annexed to Israel in a one-to-one land swap.

Settlers living deep inside the West Bank would be given the option of relocating or becoming permanent residents in the state of Palestine. The same number of Palestinians — likely refugees from the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation — would be allowed to relocate to Israel as citizens of Palestine with permanent residency in Israel.

The initiative is largely based on the Geneva Accord, a detailed, comprehensive peace plan drawn up in 2003 by prominent Israelis and Palestinians, including former officials. The nearly 100-page confederation plan includes new, detailed recommendations for how to address core issues.

Yossi Beilin, a former senior Israeli official and peace negotiator who co-founded the Geneva Initiative, said that by taking the mass evacuation of settlers off the table, the plan could be more amenable to them.

Israel's political system is dominated by the settlers and their supporters, who view the West Bank as the biblical and historical heartland of the Jewish people and an integral part of Israel.

The Palestinians view the settlements as the main obstacle to peace, and most of the international community considers them illegal. The settlers living deep inside the West Bank — who would likely end up within the borders of a future Palestinian state — are among the most radical and tend to oppose any territorial partition.

"We believe that if there is no threat of confrontations with the settlers it would be much easier for those who want to have a two-state solution," Beilin said. The idea has been discussed before, but he said a confederation would make it more "feasible."

Numerous other sticking points remain, including security, freedom of movement and perhaps most critically after years of violence and failed negotiations, lack of trust.

Israel's Foreign Ministry and the Palestinian Authority declined to comment.

The main Palestinian figure behind the initiative is Hiba Hussein, a former legal adviser to the Palestinian negotiating team going back to 1994 who hails from a prominent Jerusalem family.

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She acknowledged that the proposal regarding the settlers is “very controversial” but said the overall plan would fulfill the Palestinians’ core aspiration for a state of their own.

“It’s not going to be easy,” she added. “To achieve statehood and to achieve the desired right of self-determination that we have been working on — since 1948, really — we have to make some compromises.”

Thorny issues like the conflicting claims to Jerusalem, final borders and the fate of Palestinian refugees could be easier to address by two states in the context of a confederation, rather than the traditional approach of trying to work out all the details ahead of a final agreement.

“We’re reversing the process and starting with recognition,” Hussein said.

It’s been nearly three decades since Israeli and Palestinian leaders gathered on the White House lawn to sign the Oslo accords, launching the peace process.

Several rounds of talks over the years, punctuated by outbursts of violence, failed to yield a final agreement, and there have been no serious or substantive negotiations in more than a decade.

Israel’s current prime minister, Naftali Bennett, is a former settler leader opposed to Palestinian statehood. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, who is set to take over as prime minister in 2023 under a rotation agreement, supports an eventual two-state solution.

But neither is likely to be able to launch any major initiatives because they head a narrow coalition spanning the political spectrum from hard-line nationalist factions to a small Arab party.

On the Palestinian side, President Mahmoud Abbas’ authority is confined to parts of the occupied West Bank, with the Islamic militant group Hamas — which doesn’t accept Israel’s existence — ruling Gaza. Abbas’ presidential term expired in 2009 and his popularity has plummeted in recent years, meaning he is unlikely to be able to make any historic compromises.

The idea of the two-state solution was to give the Palestinians an independent state, while allowing Israel to exist as a democracy with a strong Jewish majority. Israel’s continued expansion of settlements, the absence of any peace process and repeated rounds of violence, however, have greatly complicated hopes of partitioning the land.

The international community still views a two-state solution as the only realistic way to resolve the conflict.

But the ground is shifting, particularly among young Palestinians, who increasingly view the conflict as a struggle for equal rights under what they — and three prominent human rights groups — say is an apartheid regime.

Israel vehemently rejects those allegations, viewing them as an antisemitic attack on its right to exist. Lapid has suggested that reviving a political process with the Palestinians would help Israel resist any efforts to brand it an apartheid state in world bodies.

Next week, Beilin and Hussein will present their plan to U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Beilin says they have already shared drafts with Israeli and Palestinian officials.

Beilin said he sent it to people who he knew would not reject it out of hand. “Nobody rejected it. It doesn’t mean that they embrace it.”

“I didn’t send it to Hamas,” he added, joking. “I don’t know their address.”

What does Ivanka Trump know about Jan. 6? Congress is asking

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump was in the Oval Office with his daughter Ivanka and Vice President Mike Pence’s national security adviser on the morning of Jan. 6, 2021, when he made yet another push to pressure Pence.

Trump again told Pence that he had a duty to reject Electoral College votes that would formalize Democrat Joe Biden’s victory in the 2020 presidential election, something the vice president had no authority to do in his ceremonial role in Congress that day.

“You don’t have the courage to make a hard decision,” Trump told Pence, according to congressional testimony. Even after Trump called him a “wimp,” Pence rebuffed the demand, issuing a lengthy statement

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afterward laying out his conclusion that he had no power to influence the outcome.

When the call ended, Ivanka Trump turned to retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg and said, "Mike Pence is a good man."

"Yes, he is," Kellogg replied.

Now the House committee investigating the riot wants to know what else Ivanka Trump heard and saw that day as they try to stitch together the narrative of the riots and the former president's role in instigating them. There was a frantic effort by many of Trump's top supporters to persuade him to intervene, and some directly sought to use his daughter as their conduit.

A committee aide said they are hopeful that she will soon commit to a time to meet.

Throughout her time in the White House, Ivanka Trump was known as a rare voice who could get through to her father and talk him out of bad decisions, though her success was mixed. The former first daughter has kept an extraordinary low profile since her father left office and has distanced herself from him and politics since moving to Florida.

But her proximity to him on Jan. 6 could provide the committee with direct access to what Trump was doing during those crucial three hours when his supporters violently stormed Capitol.

"Ivanka Trump has details about what occurred in the lead-up to and on Jan. 6 and about the former president's state of mind as events unfolded," Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla, a member of the panel, told The Associated Press.

It is highly unusual for congressional investigators to target a family member of a president, but as a senior adviser to her father, she also had a perch close to power.

Kellogg disclosed the exchange with the committee, but so far Ivanka Trump, who famously guards her image and public profile, has not talked to the panel.

The answers could have significant repercussions not only for Donald Trump, who is eyeing a political comeback in 2024, but for those in the Republican Party who have downplayed his role in the insurrection.

A spokeswoman for Ivanka Trump did not respond to multiple requests for comment. But in a statement issued in late January, a representative for her noted that Ivanka Trump did not speak at the rally near the White House where the then-president urged his supporters to "fight like hell" as Congress convened to certify the 2020 election results, and said she still believed that "any security breach or disrespect to our law enforcement is unacceptable."

Members of the committee hope to get beyond such vague assertions.

Hours after Trump's call to Pence, Ivanka Trump joined brother Donald Trump Jr., Rudy Giuliani and Kimberly Guilfoyle under a large tent at the rally to listen to Trump's speech.

She reportedly told aides she "decided to attend only because she had hoped to calm the president and help keep the event on an even keel."

After Trump's speech, as rioters began to smash through Capitol police barriers and break windows, the former president tweeted: "Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution ..."

That tweet, according to court testimony, only added to the anger fueling the mob.

Back in the White House, as staffers watched in shock at what was unfolding down Pennsylvania Avenue on television screens positioned throughout the West Wing, Trump's attention was so rapt that he hit rewind and watched certain moments again, according to Stephanie Grisham, a former White House press secretary.

"Look at all of the people fighting for me," Trump said, according to Grisham, who also served as chief of staff to first lady Melania Trump. At one point, the president was confused why staffers weren't as excited as he was watching the unrest unfold.

Kellogg testified that staff wanted the president to take immediate action to address the violence consuming the Capitol, but Trump refused.

"Is someone getting to potus? He has to tell protestors to dissipate. Someone is going to get killed," Alyssa Farrah Griffin, a former White House communications official, texted Ben Williamson, an aide to White House chief of staff Mark Meadows.

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"I've been trying for the last 30 minutes. Literally stormed in outer oval to get him to put out the first one. It's completely insane," Williamson wrote back.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., then called Ivanka Trump, pleading that the president "ask people to leave." "We're working on it," she replied.

At that point, staffers acknowledged that despite efforts by Meadows, press secretary Kayleigh McEnany and Kellogg, the only person who could get through to him would be his daughter.

Ivanka Trump, according to testimony, went on to make at least two "tenacious" attempts to reason with her father as staffers were bombarded with messages from Trump allies begging him to quell the violence.

"Can he make a statement. I saw the tweet. Ask people to leave the (Capitol)," Fox News host Sean Hannity texted Meadows.

But inside the West Wing, Kellogg strongly recommended that they not ask the president to appear in the press room, where a group of reporters would be waiting for him.

"Apparently, certain White House staff believed that a live unscripted press appearance by the President in the midst of the Capitol Hill violence could have made the situation worse," lawmakers wrote in their letter to Ivanka Trump.

The president ultimately agreed to a video statement. Multiple takes were filmed but not used. In each one of the initial takes, according to the committee, he failed to ask rioters to leave.

The final video was released on Twitter at 4:17 p.m. — nearly two hours after Trump's initial tweet criticizing Pence.

"This was a fraudulent election, but we can't play into the hands of these people," Trump said in the video. "We have to have peace. So go home. We love you; you're very special."

Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., the vice chair of the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection, has said it's hard to "imagine a more significant and more serious dereliction of duty" than Trump's failure to quell the riots.

Trump's last words that day came at 6:01 p.m. when he tweeted that the 2020 election was "unceremoniously and viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly and unfairly treated for so long."

He ended with, "Go home with love and in peace. Remember this day forever."

The committee has been aggressively interviewing witnesses — nearly 500 so far — and has subpoenaed Meadows and Trump's personal lawyer. They are asking Ivanka Trump to cooperate voluntarily.

Taylor Greene faces GOP challengers in changing Ga. district

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

HIRAM, Ga. (AP) — In her pitch to voters, Jennifer Strahan introduces herself as a mother, a Christian and a conservative. She usually skips over the fellow Republican she hopes to topple later this spring: Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene.

That's because virtually everyone in this northwest Georgia congressional district already has an opinion about Greene, whose extreme rhetoric has left her stripped of committee assignments in Washington and her personal Twitter account permanently banned.

"You don't always have to go around and tell people what she has done or said," Strahan, the 35-year-old founder of a suburban Atlanta health care advisory firm, said in an interview. "That's known."

In her first term in Congress, Greene has emerged as one of the most prominent voices of the GOP's far-right fringe, touting racist and antisemitic tropes, engaging in conspiracy theories about the coronavirus and vaccines and embracing former President Donald Trump's lie that the 2020 election was stolen. As she seeks reelection promising more of the same, Strahan is among a small group of challengers during Georgia's May 24 primary who argue they can deliver Republican values without the sideshow.

"I think people in this district are mostly tired of her crap," Charles Lutin, 69, a retired physician and Air Force flight surgeon who is another Republican trying to unseat Greene, said in an interview. "It's not anything like 95% are tired of her. But I think it's a good strong majority."

The race is unfolding in one of the nation's most significant political battlegrounds. In 2020, President Joe

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Biden was the first Democrat to carry Georgia since 1992. The state is now represented by two Democrats in the Senate. The fall campaign includes closely watched races for Senate and governor where Republicans are hoping to make up for lost ground.

But in some corners of Greene's territory, there's a sense of exhaustion from the nation's overheated politics.

David Harvey, an 85-year-old retiree in Rome, Georgia, voted for Trump in 2016, but he said the former president so divided the party that it led many Georgia conservatives to stay home rather than keep voting Republican. He said he wouldn't vote for Greene, who he believes "rode Trump's coattails" to notoriety for all the wrong reasons.

"You don't want to be a national figure for having been stripped of your committee assignments," Harvey said.

Greene declined to comment for this story. Her district, which stretches from the Atlanta exurbs to the outskirts of Chattanooga, Tennessee, is firmly Republican. And a massive fundraising advantage will help Greene fend off her opponents.

Her campaign raised nearly \$7.5 million through the end of last year, including a \$250 donation from Fox News Channel host Tucker Carlson. That's compared to the less than \$120,000 Strahan and Lutin reported combining to raise as of Dec. 31.

Greene's strength can be found along the country roads pushing into the Appalachian foothills where her red, white and blue campaign signs are abundant. They urge supporters to "flood the polls" and "Save America from Communism." Bumper stickers proclaim "Trump: He will be back."

The Republicans seeking to defeat Greene may benefit from new congressional maps approved by the GOP-controlled state Legislature that shift the district ever closer to the Atlanta region.

It already includes booming exurbs in Paulding County, such as Hiram, a once-quiet railroad town about 35 miles from the city that is now a thriving bedroom community. But it now picks up a slice of Cobb County, a core part of the metropolitan area and a onetime GOP stronghold that shifted steadily to the left during the Trump era.

The changes mean that Greene may not be able to rely solely on the Trump-aligned base in the rural swaths of her district, and will have to compete for at least some moderate voters who may be less amenable to her antagonistic politics.

"Republicans nationwide, as well as Republicans in that district in Georgia, do understand and do want to look to the future, and what is best for the nation," said Bobbie Kilberg, a well-known national GOP donor who helped organize a recent fundraiser for Strahan in Washington. "And Marjorie is not that person."

Tom Pounds, who resigned last year as Republican Party chairman in sparsely populated Dade County for many reasons, including Greene and the GOP's divisiveness statewide, said the new maps "did not do (Greene) any favors."

But "she will be very difficult to defeat based on the far-right, rural area support she has," Pounds said.

Ahead of the primary, Greene's GOP opponents are honing their appeals to voters.

Strahan is portraying herself as the conservative alternative to Greene without the drama. She promises to defend Trump's policies and beat back the "radical left." She says she felt compelled to run for Congress because of her 6-year-old son and "a lot of very progressive policies" across the U.S. that could "potentially take away many of his freedoms if we don't stand up."

But, she said, she's not interested in being a "celebrity."

Lutin, whose yard signs feature his name alongside a stethoscope, is more moderate. He calls himself "anti-Trumpist" and promotes less government spending. But he also advocates for higher taxes on the rich and embraces bipartisanship.

Lutin is Jewish and objects to what he calls Greene's "hate and blatant antisemitism," including her comparison of House mask rules — which Greene has been fined repeatedly for violating — to the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. But Lutin also said some district GOP officials have bristled at the idea that Greene is facing any primary opposition — especially in its rural, northern areas.

"People have been openly hostile," Lutin said.

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For her part, Greene has been campaigning in the district recently, sometimes drawing standing ovations when she mentions sponsoring a proposal to impeach Biden. But she is also tending to her national brand, appearing recently in Cincinnati with JD Vance, the "Hillbilly Elegy" author turned outspoken Trump supporter who is running for a Senate seat from Ohio.

"Every attack. Every lie. Every smear strengthens my base of support at home and across the country," Greene tweeted last year, before her personal account was permanently suspended.

Distaste with Greene has also fueled donations for Democrats, with Army veteran Marcus Flowers raising \$4.6-plus million by the end of last year. Three other Democrats vying to face Greene in November's general election collectively took in nearly \$2 million.

That includes Holly McCormack, a 37-year-old small business owner and conservative, rural "dirt road Democrat" from Ringgold, near the Tennessee line, who was recently turned away from a Greene town hall in her hometown.

McCormack said her campaign identified 12,000 likely Democratic voters who had moved into the district but not registered. Still, she knows she'll have to attract Republicans to have a chance, and has tried to boost her bipartisan appeal — including having dinner with the Harley-Davidson Club in rural Walker County, "so they can see I don't have horns."

"Just appealing to Dems," McCormack said, "that's a losing battle."

Saints' Alvin Kamara arrested on battery charge in Las Vegas

LAS VEGAS (AP) — After playing in the Pro Bowl on Sunday, Saints running back Alvin Kamara was arrested and accused of beating someone the night before in a Las Vegas nightclub.

Kamara had four catches for 23 yards for the NFC in the game, then was taken into custody and booked at the Clark County Detention Center on charges of battery resulting in substantial bodily harm.

Kamara remained in jail Sunday night. His bail was set at \$5,000 and a court hearing is scheduled for Monday afternoon, a jail official said.

Las Vegas police say they were dispatched to a hospital Saturday where a person had reported a battery at a nightclub. The police said detectives determined the victim was battered by Kamara.

The Saints and Kamara's agent didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The 26-year-old Kamara is one of the top running backs in the NFL. He had 1,337 yards from scrimmage and nine TDs this season on the way to being picked for his fifth Pro Bowl in five seasons as a pro.

Dolphins hire Mike McDaniels as head coach

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

The Miami Dolphins hired San Francisco 49ers offensive coordinator Mike McDaniels as their head coach Sunday, making him the first minority candidate to get hired so far this offseason.

McDaniels, who is biracial, replaces Brian Flores, who was fired despite posting winning records in the final two of his three seasons in Miami.

Flores sued the NFL, the Dolphins and two other teams last week over alleged racist hiring practices for coaches and general managers, saying the league remains "rife with racism" even as it publicly condemns it.

McDaniels had worked under 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan for the past 11 seasons and gets his first shot as a head coach after only one year as offensive coordinator.

McDaniels was credited for his role in developing San Francisco's creative running game that featured receiver Deebo Samuel as a running back at times, along with other wrinkles.

"Mike is awesome," 49ers quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo said last month. "He really is. He's kind of that, I don't want to say the mastermind behind everything, but he's kind of that guy in the background that doesn't say a whole ton to a lot of people, but his mind is always moving. The ideas that he comes up with are so fresh and new that it's a cool guy to have on the staff. ...

"He's a lot smarter than most of us. So he dumbs it down for us and kind of gets us all on the same page."

McDaniels could bring some of those wrinkles to Miami to feature playmaking receiver Jaylen Waddle in

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even more creative ways,

The Dolphins struggled offensively this season despite finishing 9-8 in a roller-coaster campaign that featured a seven-game losing streak followed by a seven-game winning streak.

Second-year quarterback Tua Tagovailoa struggled at times and Miami ranked 22nd in the league in scoring this season.

The 49ers had a much more productive offense despite also having a quarterback with limitations in Garoppolo.

The Yale-educated McDaniel got his coaching start on Mike Shanahan's staff in Denver in 2005. He worked as an offensive assistant in Houston for in 2006-08 when Kyle Shanahan was on that staff. McDaniel then worked in Washington for three years with Mike Shanahan as coach and Kyle Shanahan as offensive coordinator before working under Kyle Shanahan when he was a coordinator in Cleveland and Atlanta.

McDaniel then joined Shanahan's staff in San Francisco in 2017 as run game coordinator and took over the offensive coordinator role this past season.

The Dolphins' hiring of McDaniel followed some paths the team has used in the past, most notably how he is yet another first-time NFL head coach.

McDaniel becomes the 10th consecutive hire by the Dolphins to have exactly zero previous games as the person in charge of an NFL sideline, following Jim Bates, Nick Saban, Cam Cameron, Tony Sparano, Todd Bowles, Joe Philbin, Dan Campbell, Adam Gase and Flores. Bates, Bowles and Campbell were all interim hires.

Of those, including McDaniel, six have come during Ross' ownership.

And all of those moves have come in the last 18 years, starting with the firing of Dave Wannstedt and Bates being put into place nine games into the 2004 season.

The Dolphins haven't won a playoff game since 2000 for the second-longest active drought in the NFL to the Detroit Lions.

The hiring of McDaniel leaves the NFL with four minority head coaches with openings remaining in Houston and New Orleans. Pittsburgh's Mike Tomlin, Robert Saleh of the Jets and Washington's Ron Rivera are the others.

The 49ers will receive two extra third-round picks the next two years as compensation for developing a minority head coach.

Rogan's use of racial slurs adds to pressure on Spotify

By TOM KRISHER and LINDSEY BAHR Associated Press

Joe Rogan's mouth has put Spotify in a tough spot. Anti-coronavirus vaccine comments and racial slurs on some episodes of his popular podcast are forcing the streaming service to weigh difficult choices.

Spotify must decide where it stands on race relations and vaccine misinformation in a society with heightened sensitivity to both issues. Then there's the business decision about what to do with Rogan's \$100 million podcast, which threatens the bottom line but is also a key part of the company's strategy to be a one-stop shop for audio.

Neither the streaming service nor Rogan was talking Sunday. But experts say Spotify's management team has to choose whether to sever ties with Rogan as it risks more musicians yanking their work in protest. Or is there some middle ground that might be acceptable to artists and subscribers?

Whatever decision emerges won't sit well with one side or the other in an increasingly polarized country.

On race, the choice is between keeping Rogan and sending a message that society has become too "woke" or showing that Spotify is more attuned to a multiracial society, said Adia Harvey Wingfield, a sociology professor at Washington University in St. Louis.

"If Spotify says 'We can't drop him. He has the right to say what he wants,' that continues on the line where there is this implicit support to say racist things on these platforms," she said.

The streaming site also has to decide whether offensive words are allowable elsewhere on its app, where songs with racist, homophobic and anti-immigrant messages are available, said John Wihbey, a

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Northeastern University professor and specialist in emerging technologies.

"There's some real self-examination to be doing beyond Joe," Wihbey said. "This is a big moment of reckoning for entertainment and streaming platforms to see where the window is, what's over the line."

The bottom-line question should be pretty simple for Spotify, said Erik Gordon, a University of Michigan business and law professor. The conservative Rogan stands in contrast to the much more liberal musicians who generate the bulk of Spotify's profits, he said.

"They can't blow off the artists. The artists make Spotify," Gordon said. "They need to settle up with Rogan, let him go to a home that will be consistent with who he is. And everybody will be better off."

Having Rogan on Spotify is like having a political party with Donald Trump as the presidential candidate and liberal Elizabeth Warren as vice president. "It isn't going to work," Gordon said.

Spotify reports having 406 million active monthly users, up nearly 20% from last year, and advertising has grown largely because of podcasting. The company had 31% of the 524 million music streaming subscriptions worldwide in the second quarter of 2021, more than double that of second-place Apple Music, according to Midia Research.

Rogan's public troubles started on Jan. 24 when musician Neil Young asked to have his music removed because of concerns that Rogan was promoting skepticism about the COVID-19 vaccines. Other artists followed suit, including Joni Mitchell and Roxane Gay.

The scrutiny only intensified when a video compilation emerged last week showing Rogan repeatedly using racial slurs. Grammy-winning artist India.Arie posted it on her Instagram, using the hashtag #DeleteSpotify.

The company has yet to publicly address the slurs, but Spotify recently removed dozens of episodes of the podcast.

Spotify, which reportedly paid over \$100 million to license Rogan's podcast, said previously that it would soon add a warning to all podcasts that discuss COVID-19, directing listeners to factual, up-to-date information from scientists and public health experts.

"They take this money that's built from streaming, and they pay this guy \$100 million, but they pay us like .003% of a penny," Arie wrote. "I don't want to generate money that pays that."

Rogan apologized Saturday, saying that the slurs were the "most regretful and shameful thing" he has ever had to address and that he hasn't used the N-word in years.

Spotify CEO and co-founder Daniel Ek said last week, before the racial slurs resurfaced, that "it is important to me that we don't take on the position of being content censor."

Ek told The Wall Street Journal last week that he took responsibility for being "too slow to respond" to the criticism over vaccine misinformation. It took the company five days to respond publicly to Young.

"It's become clear to me that we have an obligation to do more to provide balance and access to widely accepted information from the medical and scientific communities guiding us through this unprecedented time," Ek continued in a statement.

Rogan is an odd mix of shock-jock and host who leads discussions of public policy, arts and culture, Wihbey said, describing his brand as conservative "bro America."

His comments were clearly racist, Wihbey said, but he hopes that Rogan will see this as a chance to substantively discuss race and vaccine issues in future episodes. His audience may not hear the discussions otherwise, Wihbey said.

"I do think that assembling this kind of audience is important," he said. "He can say things that I think can move the needle."

Wingfield has doubts that Spotify can keep Rogan, but she said the controversy could be positive if it starts a shift to discussions of racial stereotypes.

"I think that if Joe Rogan kind of learns from this experience and becomes a driving voice for that conversation, that could be really valuable," she said. "But I want to stress again that that's a pretty big if, and I don't know if it will come to that."

Olympics Live: US diplomat says human rights should be focus

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BEIJING (AP) — The Latest on the Beijing Winter Olympics:

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations says China's selection of a Uyghur athlete to help deliver the Olympic flame in Beijing was an attempt by Chinese officials to "distract" from global attention on its human rights violations.

The United States is staging a diplomatic boycott of the Olympics, sending athletes but not the traditional delegation of dignitaries, citing China's alleged systemic and widespread abuse of ethnic and religious minorities in its western region, especially Xinjiang's predominantly Muslim Uyghurs.

China's selection of cross-country skier Dinigeer Yilamujiang for the honor of being a final Olympic torch-bearer at the ceremony that opened the Winter Games was a big surprise.

To U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, that choice was "an effort by the Chinese to distract us from the real issue here at hand, that Uyghurs are being tortured, and Uyghurs are the victims of human rights violations by the Chinese."

And she told CNN's "State of the Union" that "we have to keep that front and center."

The U.S. says China is committing genocide in its treatment of the Uyghurs. China denies any abuses and says the steps it has taken are necessary to combat terrorism and a separatist movement.

The American diplomat says "we have made clear that crimes against humanity are being committed in China."

She added: "It is important that the audience who participated and witnessed this understand that this does not take away from what we know is happening on the ground there."

President Joe Biden's national security adviser says the United States "did not go around the world knocking on every country door" trying to organize a diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympics in China.

The U.S. did not send a delegation of dignitaries to Beijing but is allowing American athletes to compete. Major U.S. allies like Britain, Australia and Canada followed suit, also citing human rights abuses by the Chinese government. But an array of world leaders did attend the opening ceremonies.

Sullivan told NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday that the Biden administration made "a statement of principle about what we, the United States, were going to do." He says some nations joined the U.S. and others "made a different decision."

But he cited "the broad level of alignment" among "like-minded democracies coming together on a range of challenges that China poses, whether it's in the realm of military aggression or in the realm of economic coercion or in the realm of human rights."

Johannes Ludwig of Germany is the Olympic champion in men's luge, adding that to the World Cup overall title he won this season.

It's the 11th time in 16 Olympics that a German man — counting the days of East Germany and West Germany in there — has won the luge title. Wolfgang Kindl of Austria was second and Dominik Fischnaller of Italy was third.

Ludwig led after all four heats. He set the tone for Sunday's final two runs of the competition by setting a track record leading off the third heat, putting more pressure on everyone else in the field to catch him.

Nobody did. Only Kindl came close. Chris Mazdzer was the top American, finishing eighth.

Jakara Anthony of Australia has captured the women's moguls title at the Beijing Olympics.

Anthony's back flip with a grab at the bottom of the course sewed up the gold medal Sunday on the Secret Garden Olympic course. Her score of 83.09 edged American Jaelin Kauf, who had been poised to pick up the first gold medal for Team USA in China.

Russian athlete Anastasiia Smirnova earned the bronze while defending champion Perrine Laffont of France finished fourth.

The 23-year-old Anthony joins Dale Begg-Smith as the only Aussies to win the Olympic event. Begg-Smith

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earned his title at the 2006 Turin Games.

Japan's Ryoyu Kobayashi has won Olympic ski jumping gold on the normal hill.

Kobayashi jumped last and best, clearing 99.5 meters (326 feet) and had 129.6 points thanks to his graceful style from start to finish that won over the judges.

Austria's Manuel Fettner won silver and Dawid Kubacki of Poland earned bronze.

Two-time ski jumping gold medalist Andreas Wellinger is missing the Beijing Games because he tested positive for the coronavirus last week, clearing the way for a new champion in China.

Earlier in the night, Turkish ski jumper Fatih Arda İpcioğlu refused to say if the crescent and star on his blue skis was a statement in support of China's Uyghur community. The design on the skis used Saturday seemingly represented East Turkestan, the region home to Uyghurs. İpcioğlu finished deep in the field of 50.

Turkish ski jumper Fatih Arda İpcioğlu refused to say if the crescent and star on his blue skis was a statement in support of China's Uyghur community.

The design on the skis used Saturday seemingly represented East Turkestan, the region home to Uyghurs.

"I don't want to answer about those questions," İpcioğlu said Sunday night after jumping in the first round of the Normal Hill competition.

İpcioğlu switched skis on Sunday, saying the pair he had were for the competition.

"I'm a sportsman," he bristled. "I do just my job. The other things, I don't care about. It's not my job."

Human rights groups say the Beijing government has oppressed members of the Uyghur Muslim minority on a massive scale.

Finland men's hockey player Marko Anttila remains at an isolation hotel at the Beijing Games after testing positive for the coronavirus.

Coach Jukka Jalonen says nothing has changed with Anttila, who recovered from COVID-19 last month and has been unable to produce two negative tests that would allow him to return to the team. Jalonen and Finland players say Anttila is fully healthy and has no symptoms.

Jalonen confirmed Anttila is Finland's only player in isolation.

Defending champion Mikaela Shiffrin will set off seventh on the first run of the women's giant slalom at the Beijing Games on Monday.

Shiffrin's main rival, Slovakian Petra Vlhova, will ski first.

The 26-year-old Shiffrin is bidding for a third Olympic gold medal. It would be a first for Vlhova, and a first in Alpine skiing for Slovakia.

Sara Hector, who leads the World Cup giant slalom standings, starts just before Shiffrin. The Swedish skier is also looking for a first Olympic medal.

The two-leg giant slalom will be raced at 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Beijing time on The Ice River course at Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center.

Two-time Olympic figure skating champion Yuzuru Hanyu has arrived in Beijing two days before he's due at Capital Indoor Stadium for the start of the men's program.

The Japanese star is trying to become the first figure skater since Sweden's Gillis Grafstrom in 1928 to win three straight titles.

Hanyu took a similar approach four years ago in Pyeongchang, when he remained at his Canadian training base until two days before the start of his program. But that was pre-pandemic, and Hanyu took a risk that upon arrival in Beijing he would return the negative COVID-19 test required of anyone entering the Olympic bubble.

Hanyu is coming off his sixth Japanese championship in December. The Winnie-the-Pooh-loving wonderkind is expected to try the quad axel during his free skate, a 4 1/2-revolution jump that has never

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been landed in competition.

Nils van der Poel gave Sweden its first Olympic speedskating medal since 1988, pulling off a stunning comeback to win gold in the 5,000 meters at the Beijing Olympics.

Van der Poel was a big favorite coming into the event as the reigning world champion with an undefeated record in the distance events on this season's World Cup circuit.

He lived up to the hype in the 12 1/2-lap race at the Ice Ribbon oval, turning on the speed at the end to overcome Patrick Roest of the Netherlands with an Olympic record of 6 minutes, 8.84 seconds.

Roest had skated about an hour earlier in the sixth of 10 pairs, initially breaking the Olympic mark in 6:09.31.

It looked as though van der Poel would come up short, too. Then the Swede kicked it into another gear. He thrilled the sparse crowd by slicing into Roest's time with each stride. Turns out, van der Poel had just enough time to win gold.

The bronze went to Norway's Hallgeir Engebraaten in 6:09.88.

Sven Kramer's quest for a fourth straight speedskating gold medal in the 5,000 meters ended quickly.

The 35-year-old Dutchman skated in the first pair of the day at Beijing's Ice Ribbon and finished the grueling race in 6 minutes, 17.04 seconds. Two pairs later, both skaters posted faster times.

Kramer was the first male skater to win the same event at three straight Olympics, but he's no longer the world's dominant long-distance performer at the oval. Four years ago, he won gold at Pyeongchang in 6:09.76.

Kramer plans to retire after the Beijing Games, but he still has a couple of events to go. He'll also compete in the mass start and team pursuit.

No matter what, Kramer is already assured of leaving the sport as the most decorated speedskater in Olympic history with nine medals over the last four Olympics, including four golds.

The Australian mixed doubles curling team of Dean Hewitt and Tahli Gill pulled off a dramatic first win in their first Olympics when they beat Switzerland hours after it appeared they would be headed home because Gill returned a series of positive COVID-19 tests.

Greeted by an occasional chant of "Aussie Aussie Aussie!" by a spectator in the mostly empty Ice Cube, Hewitt and Gill beat Switzerland's Martin Rios and Jenny Perret 9-6. Gill had the big knockout shot to secure a 3-end, or three points, in the sixth end to tie the game at 6-6.

The first-ever Olympic curling team from Australia improved to 1-7. Their final game is against their coach, defending gold medalist John Morris of Canada and his new partner, Rachel Homan.

The Australian Olympic Committee announced earlier in the day that Gill and Hewitt would be heading home after Gill, who had COVID-19 before the games, returned a series of positive tests. But the committee said the Medical Expert Panel determined Gill's levels fell within an acceptable range. Gill said she was not infectious.

The Aussies got a call about an hour before the game that they could play and jumped into a cab to get to the venue. Gill said she had to grab her uniform out of her suitcases, which were already packed.

Russian skier Alexander Bolshunov pulled away from the pack early to win gold in the 30-kilometer skiathlon.

Bolshunov, the World Cup points leader in distance races, grabbed a Russian Olympic Committee flag in the final stretch and waved it in the air as he crossed the finish line in 1 hour, 16 seconds.

Bolshunov and Iivo Niskanen of Finland led the race through the first four classic ski laps but Russia's Denis Spitsov passed Niskanen once they were on the freestyle legs.

Spitsov stayed out front and secured the silver, 1 minute, 11 seconds behind Bolshunov. Niskanen held on for the bronze 2 minutes back.

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Chinese teenager Su Yiming had the surprise top score in the men's Olympic slopestyle qualifying round. Throwing a triple cork, the sort of trick most riders save for finals, Su finished with a score of 86.80. It topped his idol, Mark McMorris of Canada, and defending Olympic champion Red Gerard, who also both advanced to Monday's final.

The 17-year-old Su clapped his hands in excitement after finishing his first-round run as a sparse audience in the stands cheered. Su won a big air competition in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, in December. His best slopestyle finish on the World Cup circuit was sixth on New Year's Day.

Gerard wound up fifth in qualifying and McMorris second. The top 12 riders moved on.

Alpine skiing's power couple will have a busy day on the Olympic slopes — as long as the wind calms down, that is.

Mikaela Shiffrin and Aleksander Aamodt Kilde are now both supposed to race Monday after the men's downhill was pushed back a day because of too-strong gusts at the scheduled start Sunday. Shiffrin and Kilde are dating.

Kilde is considered the man to beat in the downhill. The Norwegian leads the World Cup standings in that event and was fastest during training in China on Friday.

Shiffrin is the defending Olympic champion in the women's giant slalom, which already was on the Alpine program for Monday.

The two-leg GS will be raced at 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on the technical slope at Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center. In between those runs, the downhill will be held at noon on the speed slope about a half-mile away.

The Australian mixed doubles curling team received a late reprieve and returned to competition at the Beijing Olympics after an earlier announcement that it would head home after Tahli Gill returned a series of positive COVID-19 tests.

The Australian Olympic Committee said Gill and Dean Hewitt could continue under the close contact provisions.

"We are thrilled for Tahli and Dean and I am delighted that our headquarters team continued pressing her case, after earlier advice that the pair could no longer compete," said Geoff Lipshut, head of the Australian delegation.

Gill and Hewitt, representing Australia's first-ever Olympic curling team, were back at the Ice Cube in time to play Switzerland in the round robin competition. They are winless in seven games.

Gill contracted COVID-19 prior to the games. Ongoing testing alternated between negative and positive. She had been allowed to compete under the close contact arrangements after discussions with the IOC and games organizers. The AOC said earlier Sunday that initial attempts to return Gill to competition were rebuffed by the IOC and health authorities.

The International Olympic Committee says Olympic officials will meet with Netherlands state broadcaster NOS, which has been frustrated by fallout from its journalist being manhandled by a games security official during a live report.

NOS, which pays rights fees for the Beijing Olympics, disputed comments made Saturday by an IOC spokesman that it was contacted about the incident.

In a rare public criticism of the IOC by an official rights holder, NOS said none of its management nor reporter Sjoerd Den Daas had spoken to anyone from the Olympic body.

China-based Den Daas was pushed away from the camera by the guard while broadcasting live on Friday evening before the opening ceremony.

IOC spokesman Mark Adams clarified that contact with NOS on Friday and Saturday was through the Olympic broadcasting subsidiary, and that a meeting scheduled Sunday "should be the end of the matter."

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Olympic organizers say they're addressing complaints about isolation conditions for athletes who test positive for the coronavirus and working to ensure they have clean rooms, better food and access to training equipment.

"These are exactly the kind of things we have to address. It's a duty. It's a responsibility. We have to make sure that the expectations are met," said Christophe Dubi, the International Olympic Committee's executive director for the games.

The comments came after multiple complaints about the isolation conditions. The German team called the situation for its athletes "unreasonable" and said rooms should be bigger and cleaner.

Russian biathlon competitor Valeria Vasnetsova said she couldn't stomach most of the food she was given, and mostly survived on a few pieces of pasta. Soon after the post, a team spokesperson posted a picture showing what he said was improved food, including salmon, cucumbers, sausages and yogurt.

A total of 363 people inside the Olympic bubble have tested positive for COVID.

The first event of the Alpine skiing schedule at the Beijing Olympics, the men's downhill, has been postponed because of strong wind that made it too dangerous to race.

No new date was announced immediately.

The first women's race -- the giant slalom -- is scheduled for Monday, with Mikaela Shiffrin of the U.S. defending her Olympic gold from 2018.

At the top of the speed course, known as The Rock, the wind was whipping at 30 mph, with gusts up to 40 mph, when Sunday's men's race originally was scheduled to begin at 11 a.m.

The start was delayed three times for a total of three hours in the hope that the wind would relent. But eventually the decision was made at 1 p.m. to put it off to another day.

Wind was also an issue for Alpine skiing at the 2018 Pyongchang Games, where multiple races were postponed and the schedule was shuffled repeatedly.

Saturday's third and final training session for the men was stopped after just three skiers because of wind. None of the world's top racers had ever seen the course until the first training run on Thursday. The usual pre-Olympics test events were scrapped because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The powerful Russian figure skating team is in first place in the team competition at the Beijing Games after a winning performance from world champion Kamila Valieva and another strong skate from Mark Kondratiuk.

The team representing the Russian Olympic Committee has 45 points, two ahead of the U.S., which had a couple of shaky performances from Karen Chen and Vincent Zhou to slip out of first place.

The biggest surprise on the second of three days of team competition was Japan. Wakaba Higuchi was second in the women's short program before 18-year-old Yuma Kagiyama delivered a personal-best score of 208.94 points to easily win the men's free skate, sending the Japanese team into medal contention with 39 points.

The team competition concludes Monday with the women and pairs free skate and the free dance.

Australia's first-ever Olympic mixed doubles curling team has pulled out of the Beijing Games after Tahli Gill returned a series of positive COVID-19 tests.

The Australian Olympic Committee said it was trying to make arrangements to have Gill and Dean Hewitt fly home rather than having Gill remain in an isolation hotel. They will miss their final two games and finish 0-7 in round robin play.

Gill contracted COVID-19 prior to the games. Ongoing testing alternated between negative and positive. She had been allowed to compete under the close contact arrangements after discussions with the IOC and games organizers.

Attempts to return Gill to competition were rebuffed by the IOC and health authorities, Australian Olympic team head Geoff Lipshut said.

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"We made the case that Tahli was at the end of the infection cycle but further positive results early this morning ended our hopes. Rather than remain in isolation, we now have the option of returning Tahli and Dean home," Lipshut said.

Zoi Sadowski Synnott won New Zealand's first gold medal in Winter Olympics history, stomping down a pressure-packed run on her last trip down the mountain Sunday to win the title in women's slopestyle. The 20-year-old was one of the very few to put down clean run on a supersized course, where hard-packed snow and bone-cold wind chills made things difficult for all 12 finalists, including two-time defending champion Jamie Anderson, who finished ninth.

Sadowski Synnott went into her last of three runs trailing American Julia Marino but came up big. She landed a double-cork 1080 on the second jump, and while not repeating that jump the way she did when she won the Winter X Games last month, her backside 1080 off the final kicker was more than enough. She raised her hands in the air after landing, knowing what she'd done. Marino and third-place finisher Tess Coady of Australia knew it, too. They gang-tackled her at the finish line to celebrate.

Olympic favorite Kamila Valieva nearly eclipsed her own world record in the short program of the team figure skating event at the Beijing . That sends her Russian team into the lead heading into the men's free skate later Sunday.

The 15-year-old Valieva's score of 90.18 points to "In Memoriam" by the Russian pianist and composer Kirill Richter at the Beijing Games was just off the record of 90.45 points set just weeks ago at the European championships.

The Russians moved into first place with 36 points, two ahead of Day 1 leader Team USA and seven ahead of Japan.

Karen Chen took the ice for the Americans but made a couple of mistakes, including a fall on her triple loop near the end of the program. That left her in fifth place in the short program and cost her team valuable points.

Wakaba Higuchi was second, pushing her Japanese team into podium contention. Reigning gold medalist Canada survived the cutoff thanks to a strong performance from Madeline Schizas, while China claimed the last spot in the free skates by winning a tiebreaker with Georgia.

Navy identifies SEAL trainee who died after 'Hell Week'

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A Navy SEAL candidate who who died just hours after completing the grueling Hell Week test was identified Sunday as a 24-year-old sailor who joined the military last year.

Seaman Kyle Mullen died at a San Diego area hospital on Friday after he and another SEAL trainee reported experiencing symptoms of an unknown illness, the Navy said.

The other sailor, whose name has not been released, was hospitalized in stable condition, the San Diego Union-Tribune reported Sunday.

The cause of death is unknown and under investigation. Both men fell ill just hours after they successfully completed the test that ends the first phase of assessment and selection for the elite Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) class.

The Navy said neither one had experienced an accident or unusual incident during the five-and-a-half-day Hell Week.

Rear Adm. H.W. Howard III, the commander of Naval Special Warfare Command in Coronado, California, offered his sympathies to Mullen's family in a statement.

"We are extending every form of support we can to the Mullen family and Kyle's BUD/S classmates," Howard said.

Mullen joined the Navy in March 2021, according to his Navy biography. He reported to SEAL training in Coronado in July, the Union-Tribune said.

The Hell Week test is part of the BUD/S class, which involves basic underwater demolition, survival and

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other combat tactics. It comes in the fourth week as SEAL candidates are being assessed and hoping to be selected for training within the Naval Special Warfare Basic Training Command.

The SEAL program tests physical and psychological strength along with water competency and leadership skills. The program is so grueling that at least 50% to 60% don't make it through Hell Week, when candidates are pushed to the limit.

The last SEAL candidate to die during the assessment phase was 21-year-old Seaman James Derek Lovelace in 2016. He was struggling to tread water in full gear in a giant pool when his instructor pushed him underwater at least twice. He lost consciousness and died.

His death was initially ruled a homicide by the San Diego County Medical Examiner. A year later, after an investigation, the Navy said it would not pursue criminal charges in Lovelace's drowning. An autopsy revealed he had an enlarged heart that contributed to his death, and that he also had an abnormal coronary artery, which has been associated with sudden cardiac death, especially in athletes.

It was unclear from the autopsy report how much Lovelace's heart abnormalities contributed to his death.

The latest death also comes just two months after a Navy SEAL commander died from injuries he suffered during a training accident in Virginia. Cmdr. Brian Bourgeois, 43, fell while fast-roping down from a helicopter, and he died several days later.

Ottawa declares state of emergency over COVID-19 protests

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — The mayor of Canada's capital declared a state of emergency Sunday and a former U.S. ambassador to Canada said groups in the U.S. must stop interfering in the domestic affairs of America's neighbor as protesters opposed to COVID-19 restrictions continued to paralyze Ottawa's downtown.

Mayor Jim Watson said the declaration highlights the need for support from other jurisdictions and levels of government. It gives the city some additional powers around procurement and how it delivers services, which could help purchase equipment required by frontline workers and first responders.

Thousands of protesters descended in Ottawa again on the weekend, joining a hundred who remained since last weekend. Residents of Ottawa are furious at the nonstop blaring of horns, traffic disruption and harassment and fear no end is in sight after the police chief called it a "siege" that he could not manage.

The "freedom truck convoy" has attracted support from many U.S. Republicans including former President Donald Trump, who called Prime Minister Justin Trudeau a "far left lunatic" who has "destroyed Canada with insane Covid mandates."

"Canada US relations used to be mainly about solving technical issues. Today Canada is unfortunately experiencing radical US politicians involving themselves in Canadian domestic issues. Trump and his followers are a threat not just to the US but to all democracies," Bruce Heyman, a former U.S. ambassador under President Barack Obama, tweeted.

Heyman said "under no circumstances should any group in the USA fund disruptive activities in Canada. Period. Full stop."

After crowdfunding site GoFundMe said it would refund or redirect to charities the vast majority of the millions raised by demonstrators protesting in the Canadian capital, prominent U.S. Republicans like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis complained.

But GoFundMe had already changed its mind and said it would be issuing refunds to all. The site said it cut off funding for the organizers because it had determined the effort violated the site's terms of service due to unlawful activity.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford has called it an occupation.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton tweeted: "Patriotic Texans donated to Canadian truckers' worthy cause." and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said on Fox News "government doesn't have the right to force you to comply to their arbitrary mandates."

"For some senior American politicians, patriotism means renting a mob to put a G-7 capital under siege," tweeted Gerald Butts, a former senior adviser to Trudeau.

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In Canada's largest city, Toronto, police controlled and later ended a much smaller protest by setting up road blocks and preventing any trucks or cars from getting near the provincial legislature. Police also moved in to clear a key intersection in the city.

Many Canadians have been outraged over the crude behavior of the demonstrators. Some protesters set fireworks off on the grounds of the National War Memorial late Friday. A number have carried signs and flags with swastikas last weekend and compared vaccine mandates to fascism.

Protesters have said they won't leave until all mandates and COVID-19 restrictions are gone. They are also calling for the removal of Trudeau's government, though it is responsible for few of the measures, most of which were put in place by provincial governments.

Top Biden aide says Ukraine invasion could come 'any day'

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Sunday that Russia could invade Ukraine "any day," launching a conflict that would come at an "enormous human cost."

The senior adviser to President Joe Biden offered another stark warning the day after U.S. officials confirmed that Russia has assembled at least 70% of the military firepower it likely intends to have in place by mid-month to give President Vladimir Putin the option of launching a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"If war breaks out, it will come at an enormous human cost to Ukraine, but we believe that based on our preparations and our response, it will come at a strategic cost to Russia as well," Sullivan said.

Sullivan did not directly address reports that the White House has briefed lawmakers that a full Russian invasion could lead to the quick capture of Kyiv and potentially result in as many as 50,000 casualties as he made appearances on a trio of Sunday talk shows.

U.S. officials, who discussed internal assessments of the Russian buildup on the condition that they not be identified, sketched out a series of indicators suggesting that Putin intends to start an invasion in the coming weeks, although the size and scale are unclear. They stressed that a diplomatic solution appears to remain possible.

Among those military indicators: an exercise of Russia's strategic nuclear forces that usually is held each fall was rescheduled for mid-February to March. That coincides with what U.S. officials see as the most likely window for invasion.

The administration has stepped up warnings in recent days that Russia increasingly seems intent on further invading Ukrainian territory.

Last week, Biden administration officials said that intelligence findings showed that the Kremlin had worked up an elaborate plot to fabricate an attack by Ukrainian forces that Russia could use as a pretext to take military action against its neighbor.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Thursday that the scheme included production of a graphic propaganda video that would show staged explosions and use corpses and actors depicting grieving mourners.

"It could happen as soon as tomorrow or it could take some weeks yet," Sullivan said. He added that Putin "has put himself in a position with military deployments to be able to act aggressively against Ukraine at any time now."

Sullivan said that the administration held on to hope that the Russians would move to de-escalate the situation through diplomacy.

"The key thing is that the United States needs to be and is prepared for any of those contingencies and in lockstep with our allies and partners," Sullivan said. "We have reinforced and reassured our allies on the eastern flank."

Texas Rep. Michael McCaul, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, attended a classified briefing last week that administration officials gave to members of Congress. He was asked whether he came away from the briefing thinking it was certain that Russia would move on Ukraine.

"I would say the conditions are there. It's more likely than not. I think the noose is being prepared. It's around Ukraine right now as we speak. These are dangerous times," McCaul said.

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Biden's ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said the administration was still seeking a diplomatic solution, but "at the same time, we know that the Russians continue to prepare, and we will be working to address the security issues."

Sen. John Barrasso, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Ukraine was the first part of Putin's plan to reassemble the Soviet Union. He worried about what signal that could send to U.S. adversaries.

"He needs to choke on trying to swallow Ukraine because if it's easy pickings for him, my worry is that then China moves against Taiwan and Iran moves quickly to a nuclear weapon."

Meanwhile, elite U.S. troops and equipment landed Sunday in southeastern Poland near the border with Ukraine following Biden's orders to deploy 1,700 soldiers there amid fears of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Hundreds more troops from the 82nd Airborne Division are expected to arrive at the Rzeszow-Jasionka Airport. A U.S. Air Force Boeing C-17 Globemaster plane brought a few dozen troops and vehicles.

Their commander is Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue, who on Aug. 30 was the last American soldier to leave Afghanistan.

"Our national contribution here in Poland shows our solidarity with all of our allies here in Europe and, obviously, during this period of uncertainty we know that we are stronger together," Donahue said at the airport.

Biden ordered additional U.S. troops deployed to Poland, Romania and Germany to demonstrate America's commitment to NATO's eastern flank amid the tensions between Russia and Ukraine. NATO's eastern member Poland borders both Russia and Ukraine. Romania borders Ukraine.

The division can rapidly deploy within 18 hours and conduct parachute assaults to secure key objectives. Based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the division's history goes back to 1917.

Biden is set to meet with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Monday at the White House. Scholz has said that Moscow would pay a "high price" in the event of an attack, but his government's refusal to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine, bolster its troop presence in eastern Europe or spell out which sanctions it would support against Russia has drawn criticism abroad and at home.

French President Emmanuel Macron was to arrive Monday in Moscow for talks with Putin, and in the days to come, Scholz will be there, too. Biden and Macron spoke by phone on Sunday, discussing "diplomatic and deterrence efforts in response to Russia's continued military build-up on Ukraine's borders," according to the White House.

Sullivan expressed certainty that operation of the Russia-to-Germany Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline "will not move forward" if Russia further invades Ukraine. Construction of the pipeline is complete, but gas is not yet flowing.

"While it's true that Germany has not sent arms to Ukraine, after the United States, they are the second largest donor to Ukraine in Europe," Sullivan said. "The great thing ... about having the kind of alliances we have with 30 NATO allies is that different allies are going to take different pieces of this."

Sullivan appeared on "Fox News Sunday," NBC's "Meet the Press" and ABC's "This Week." McCaul spoke on ABC, and Barrasso was on Fox. Thomas-Greenfield was on CNN's "State of the Union."

Crossing lines, Manchin endorses Murkowski's Senate campaign

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin on Sunday endorsed Republican colleague Lisa Murkowski for reelection, crossing party lines to back the incumbent from Alaska who faces a primary challenger supported by former President Donald Trump.

The conservative West Virginia lawmaker said he has teamed well with Murkowski in the 50-50 Senate to build bipartisan support for legislation such as President Joe Biden's infrastructure law. He said Alaska and the Senate are well-served with her in office.

"It's hypocritical to basically work with a person day in and day out and then, when they're in cycle, you're supposed to be against them because they have an R or D by their name," said Manchin, who appeared

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with Murkowski on CNN's "State of the Union" to promote the values of bipartisanship.

"Alaska could only be so lucky to have her continue to serve them," he said.

Murkowski faces GOP primary challenger Kelly Tshibaka, who has support from Trump and Alaska Republican party leaders but who significantly trails the incumbent in fundraising. A Democrat has yet to enter the race; the state's last Democratic senator, Mark Begich, lost reelection in 2014.

It isn't the first time that Manchin has bucked his party's political operation. In 2020, he endorsed Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, in her reelection bid. Manchin had indicated last April that he would support Murkowski if she chose to run again this year.

Murkowski is one of seven Republican senators who voted to convict Trump in his second impeachment trial for his role in stoking the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection. Her reelection bid plays up her credentials as a centrist in the Senate, working across party lines to "stand up to any politician or special interest that threatens our way of life."

A member of the Senate since 2002, Murkowski lost the Republican primary for her seat in 2010 but ultimately won after launching a successful write-in campaign. She's joined Democrats several times on high-profile votes, including opposing Trump's effort to repeal President Barack Obama's health law in 2017 and her 2018 refusal to vote to confirm Brett Kavanaugh as a Supreme Court justice.

Murkowski said Sunday she as well would support Manchin, who is up for reelection in 2024.

"If he's running, I'm endorsing him," she said.

Manchin has drawn ire from the progressive wing of his party over his reluctance to back broad climate and social safety net legislation that Biden envisioned would pass with support from all 50 Democratic senators. After initially indicating he could support a version of that bill, Manchin announced in December that he would not back the effort and that the legislation in its present form was dead.

On Sunday, Manchin indicated he recently talked to Biden but said the topic didn't really come up because of the need for separate action by Feb. 18 on a separate funding bill.

He reiterated a desire to pass smaller pieces of Biden's proposal with input and support from Republicans. "These are major changes," Manchin said. "It is going to change society as we know it."

U.S. airborne infantry troops arrive in Poland amid tensions

By MONIKA SCISLOWSKA and CZAREK SOKOLOWSKI undefined

RZESZOW-JASIONKA, Poland (AP) — A few dozen elite U.S. troops and equipment were seen landing Sunday in southeastern Poland near the border with Ukraine, following President Joe Biden's orders to deploy 1,700 soldiers there amid fears of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Hundreds more infantry troops of the 82nd Airborne Division are still expected to arrive at the Rzeszow-Jasionka airport, 90 kilometers (56 miles) from Poland's border with Ukraine. A U.S. Air Force Boeing C-17 Globemaster plane brought a few dozen troops and vehicles.

Their commander is Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue, who on Aug. 30 was the last American soldier to leave Afghanistan.

"Our national contribution here in Poland shows our solidarity with all of our allies here in Europe and, obviously, during this period of uncertainty, we know that we are stronger together," Donahue said at the airport.

In Warsaw, Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak hailed the deployment, saying that "deterrence and solidarity are the best response to Moscow's aggressive policy, to the aggressive attempt at reconstructing the Russian empire."

Russia has amassed some 100,000 troops on the borders of Ukraine, some for joint military exercises in Belarus, but insists it has no intentions of invading Ukraine.

A collective response by NATO members is "the best response to a threat, the only method of assuring security to Poland and to other NATO countries on the alliance's eastern flank," Blaszczak said.

He stressed he has held a number of talks on the subject with U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

Biden ordered additional U.S. troops deployed to Poland, Romania and Germany to demonstrate to both allies and foes America's commitment to NATO's eastern flank amid rising tensions between Russia and

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Ukraine. NATO's eastern member Poland borders both Russia and Ukraine. Romania borders Ukraine.

The division can rapidly deploy within 18 hours and conduct parachute assaults to secure key objectives. Based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the division's history goes back to 1917.

Earlier in the week, U.S. planes brought equipment and logistics troops in preparation for the arrival of part of the division to the airport.

Polish soldiers have previously worked together with the U.S. division on missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and have trained together, according to Maj. Przemyslaw Lipczynski, a spokesman for the Polish Army's 18th Mechanized Division.

Some 4,000 U.S. troops have been stationed in Poland since 2017 on a rotating basis, as a security boost in the face of Russia's increased military activity.

European officials fear that the continent's energy supplies are vulnerable in the case of hostilities over Ukraine.

German leader's stance on Russia looms over 1st visit to US

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz set off Sunday for Washington seeking to reassure Americans that his country stands alongside the United States and other NATO partners in opposing any Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Scholz has said that Moscow would pay a "high price" in the event of an attack, but his government's refusal to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine, bolster Germany's troop presence in Eastern Europe or spell out which sanctions it would support against Russia has drawn criticism abroad and at home.

"The Germans are right now missing in action. They are doing far less than they need to do," Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat and member of the Armed Services Committee, recently told an audience of Ukrainian Americans in his state, Connecticut.

This sentiment was echoed by Republican Sen. Rob Portman, who questioned why Berlin hadn't yet approved a request to let NATO member Estonia pass over old German howitzers to Ukraine. "That makes no sense to me, and I've made that very clear in conversations with the Germans and others," Portman told NBC.

Ahead of his trip, Scholz defended Germany's position not to supply Kyiv with lethal weapons, but insisted that his country is doing its bit by providing significant economic support to Ukraine.

Asked about the future of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that seeks to bring Russian natural gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea, bypassing Ukraine, Scholz refused to make any explicit commitments.

"Nothing is ruled out," he told German public broadcaster ARD.

Germany has come under criticism over its heavy reliance on Russian energy supplies and the gas pipeline has long been opposed by the United States. But it is strongly supported by some in Scholz's center-left Social Democratic Party, including former chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

The 77-year-old Schroeder is close to Russian President Vladimir Putin and heads the shareholders' committee of Nord Stream AG and the board of directors of Nord Stream 2.

In a move likely to embarrass Scholz ahead of his first official trip to Washington, the Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom announced Friday that Schroeder — who has accused Ukraine of "saber-rattling" in its standoff with Russia — has been nominated to join its board of directors.

Scholz's spokesman declined repeated requests for comment on Schroeder's ties to Putin.

Despite Germany's reluctance to officially put the new pipeline — which has yet to receive an operating permit — on the negotiating table with Russia, the United States has made clear that even without Berlin's agreement the project is dead should Moscow launch an attack.

"One way or the other, if Russia invades Ukraine, Nord Stream 2 will not move forward," U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan told "Fox News Sunday."

Scholz will meet President Joe Biden and members of Congress on Monday to try to smooth out differences. The 63-year-old's performance in Washington could have broad implications for U.S.-German

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relations and for Scholz's standing at home.

While former President Donald Trump frequently slammed Germany, accusing it of not pulling its weight internationally, his successor has sought to rebuild relations with Berlin.

"Biden has taken some real risks, including on the the issue of the German-Russian gas pipeline," said Jeff Rathke, president of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies.

"(Scholz's) visit to Washington is an opportunity for him to try to turn that page," said Rathke.

Having succeeded long-time German leader Angela Merkel last year, Scholz also needs to appease doubters at home who accuse him of pulling a diplomatic vanishing act compared to his European counterparts. With the phrase "Where is Scholz?" trending on social media last week, German conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz called for "clear words" from the government on the Ukraine crisis.

"We must rule nothing out as a reaction to a further military escalation," the leader of Merkel's center-right bloc said, though he too has been skeptical about sending possible German arms shipments to Ukraine.

Others in Scholz's three-party governing coalition have struck a harsher tone toward Russia.

Speaking alongside her Russian counterpart in Moscow last month, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock of the Green Party branded Russia's troop deployment at the border with Ukraine a "threat." She plans to visit Ukraine on Monday and Tuesday and inspect the front line between Ukrainian troops and areas held by Russian-based separatists in the east.

Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, a member of the Free Democrats who chairs Germany's parliamentary defense committee, said Schroeder's work for Moscow "harms the country he should serve" and suggested removing the privileges he enjoys since leaving office.

Whatever Germany does to support Ukraine will likely come at a cost.

Berlin's approval of 5,000 helmets for Ukrainian troops last week drew widespread mockery. Kyiv has since asked Germany for more military hardware, including medium-range and portable anti-aircraft missile systems, as well as ammunition.

Meanwhile, some German officials worry that any mention of further sanctions against Russia, let alone a full-blown conflict, could drive up Europe's already high gas prices. Constanze Stelzenmueller, a specialist on trans-Atlantic relations at the Brookings Institution, noted that Europe will bear the brunt of blowback costs from economic sanctions against Russia.

"You have populists in Europe always looking for ways to exploit political differences and tensions," she said. "That's what's at stake here."

In an uncharacteristic outburst at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, Scholz — who was then Germany's finance minister — announced that he would be pulling out a figurative "bazooka" to help businesses cope with the crisis by setting aside more than 1 trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) in state aid.

Scholz may need to make a similarly expansive gesture to ease concerns in Washington and beyond, said Rathke.

"Germany is going to have to show that it is not only committed to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, but that it's putting real resources behind it now, not just pointing to what it's done in the past," he said.

Reports of spyware use on key witness roil Netanyahu trial

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli police allegedly used sophisticated spyware against a key witness in the corruption trial of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli media reported, jolting the trial and shining a light on a contentious Israeli-developed surveillance tool.

Netanyahu is in the midst of a lengthy corruption trial over charges of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. In the initial report by Israeli Channel 13 last week, police were said to have used spyware to collect information off the witness' phone without first obtaining authorization, sparking an uproar.

Netanyahu's lawyers have demanded answers from the state about what was gathered and how. The

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report has reenergized Netanyahu's supporters, who have long seen the trial as part of a conspiracy to topple the polarizing former leader. Even Netanyahu's political opponents are outraged.

"This is an earthquake that would justify a governmental commission of inquiry," Cabinet Minister Tamar Zandberg, who sits in the coalition that ousted Netanyahu last year, told Israeli Army Radio Sunday. That the spyware was likely Israeli-developed was a "point of shame," she said.

Amnon Lord, a columnist at the pro-Netanyahu Israel Hayom daily, called for a mistrial.

The witness whose phone was reportedly hacked, Shlomo Filber, is expected to testify in the coming days and Netanyahu's lawyers are expected to request a delay to his testimony. It remains unclear whether any of the evidence allegedly gathered was used against Netanyahu.

Police, as well as a lawyer for Netanyahu, did not respond to a request for comment. But last week, Netanyahu, who was ousted last June by a new coalition government, accused police in a Twitter post of illegally hacking into a phone "to topple a strong, right-wing prime minister."

Israel's Justice Ministry declined to comment.

State prosecutors have told Netanyahu's lawyers that they are "thoroughly examining" the reports, according to internal communications seen by The Associated Press.

The report comes after Israeli newspaper Calcalist reported that Israeli police tracked targets without proper authorization. Last week, Israel's national police force said it had found evidence pointing to improper use of the spyware by its own investigators to snoop on Israeli citizens' phones. The revelations shocked Israelis and prompted condemnations from across the political spectrum.

Authorities have not said which spyware might have been improperly used.

But the Calcalist report said at least some of the cases involved the Israeli company NSO.

NSO is Israel's best-known maker of offensive cyberware, but it is far from the only one. Its flagship product, Pegasus, allows operators to seamlessly infiltrate a target's mobile phone and gain access to the device's contents, including messages and contacts, as well as location history.

NSO has faced mounting scrutiny over Pegasus, which has been linked to snooping on human rights activists, journalists and politicians across the globe in countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

NSO says all of its sales are approved by Israel's Defense Ministry. Such sales have reportedly played a key role in Israel's development of ties with Arab states in the Gulf.

Aluf Benn, editor of the Haaretz daily, said it was a surprising twist that Netanyahu was now portraying himself as a victim.

"What an irony: The man who leveraged Pegasus for foreign-policy gains now believes he lost his domestic power on account of the spyware," he wrote.

State AG races become litmus test for GOP election claims

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden, a Republican, has won re-election multiple times in a state where the GOP dominates politically and, in his telling, has "a 20-year track record of calling balls and strikes fairly and squarely."

That may not be enough for him to survive a GOP primary challenge and keep his seat. Wasden was one of seven Republican attorneys general to opt against joining an ill-fated challenge of the 2020 presidential election results in other states. And last fall, he declined to join other GOP attorneys general in a letter to President Joe Biden complaining about vaccine mandates, although he ended up joining lawsuits against several of them.

His more moderate positions have put him at odds with a growing share of Republicans who chafe at COVID-19 restrictions and repeat the false claim that widespread fraud cost former President Donald Trump re-election. Wasden is facing two challengers who are to his right in the Republican primary as he seeks a sixth term as the state's top government lawyer.

One of the challengers, Arthur McComber, said a key function of the attorney general's role is to act as

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a watchdog against federal power — something he said Wasden hasn't done enough.

"It's basically a misunderstanding of the attorney general position," said McComber, a real estate lawyer. The challenge to Wasden from within his own party is emblematic of the broader far-right shift within the GOP. Similar dynamics are permeating races for attorney general across the country as an office often referred to as "the people's lawyer" — responsible in most states for criminal prosecutions and consumer protections — has become increasingly consumed by ideological battles.

Seats for attorneys general are up in 30 states this year. Some of the most likely to attract heavy spending will be in political battlegrounds such as Michigan, Nevada and Wisconsin, states that again are expected to play outsized roles in the 2024 presidential contest.

Republicans currently hold 27 attorneys general seats. Paul Nolette, a Marquette University political scientist who studies the office, said Republicans could bump that number to 30 or more in a midterm election year when Republicans are primed to do well in races up and down the ballot.

They've already notched an early victory. Last fall, voters ousted the incumbent Democratic attorney general in Virginia, a state that had been leaning increasingly Democratic in recent years. It was part of a GOP wave in the state that also saw the party claim the governor's office and one house of the legislature.

Nolette said party affiliation matters for the office more than it used to: "The office has really become like other statewide offices at this point — highly polarized."

Ahead of the 2020 election, an arm of the Republican Attorneys General Association held "war games" for officials to plan a reaction in case of a Trump loss. That group, the Rule of Law Defense Fund, later promoted the Jan. 6, 2021, rally that preceded the storming of the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters seeking to thwart the certification of electors.

For Democrats, there is increasing concern that a Republican wave in this year's elections could sweep Democratic governors, secretaries of state and attorneys general out of power in crucial presidential battleground states. Steve Bullock, a Democrat who has served as attorney general and governor in Montana, warned that a rogue attorney general could undermine election results.

"How can they mess with it if they don't actually believe in the rule of law? Both in affirmatively bringing action and defensively failing to defend the states' interest," he said.

While secretaries of state oversee elections in most states, attorneys general can play pivotal roles in the aftermath, as demonstrated in 2020.

A month after that election, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton asked the U.S. Supreme Court to throw out the results in four states that supported Biden over Trump. The court rejected the effort, but only after 18 other Republican attorneys general filed papers in support.

Idaho's Wasden was not one of them.

"In taking a look at the Texas case, it was evident that that lawsuit was contrary to the Constitution," he said in an interview. "If Texas can sue Pennsylvania, then California can sue Idaho."

McComber, who has slightly outraised Wasden during the campaign so far, said he would have joined the Texas lawsuit and added an amicus brief to raise additional legal points. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately found that the states lacked standing to challenge election results in other states.

Democratic attorneys general defended their states' 2020 election results in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, as did the Republican attorney general in Georgia.

"The public must know which side their state AG is on," Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford, co-chair of the Democratic Attorneys General Association, said during a video news conference in January.

Sigal Chattah, the only Republican running for the job in Nevada, faults Ford, among other things, for not investigating election fraud sooner and more vigorously. His office filed charges in October against one voter for allegedly casting a ballot on behalf of his deceased wife.

"Do we really believe this was an isolated incident?" Chattah asked. "I don't."

The Associated Press investigated potential cases of voter fraud from the 2020 presidential election in Nevada and the five other political battleground states where Trump and his allies disputed his loss. The AP found that election officials across Nevada had identified between 93 and 98 potential cases — repre-

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senting less than 0.3% of Biden's margin of victory in the state.

The fields are not set in every attorney general race, but GOP primary showdowns between more establishment-style conservatives and those further to the right is a common theme in several states, including Kansas, Michigan and Minnesota.

"In so many of these races, it is a race to see who can align themselves closest with Donald Trump, his brand of politics and the big lie" that the election was stolen, said Geoff Burgan, a spokesman for the Democratic Attorneys General Association.

Johnny Koremenos, a spokesman for the Republican Attorneys General Association, declined to directly answer questions left by voicemail and email about whether Republican attorneys general might seek to undermine lawful election results. In a statement, he said "2022 will be a great year for Republicans running for attorney general."

In Michigan, where nominees are chosen at state party conventions rather than primaries, former state House Speaker Tom Leonard is hoping for a rematch against Democratic incumbent Dana Nessel.

But first, Leonard, who touts having been named the state's most conservative lawmaker, has to defeat two GOP opponents in a party convention. One of them is Matthew DePerno, a lawyer who sued Michigan's Antrim County claiming voting machines there recorded votes for Trump as being for Biden in the 2020 election. The claim was dismissed.

While Leonard is focusing on issues such as reducing violent crime, DePerno sees election fraud as a driving issue — despite Republicans themselves finding no evidence of systemic fraud in the state. He has Trump's support.

"That says it all," said David Dulio, a political scientist at Oakland University in Michigan. "He has certainly hitched his wagon to Donald Trump, counting on the fact that the Trump brand will have strength in this election."

DePerno did not respond to interview requests.

10 Cuban migrants rescued from sinking vessel off Florida

MIAMI (AP) — Ten Cuban migrants in a sinking vessel were rescued off the Florida coast, according to the U.S. Coast Guard.

A Coast Guard boat spotted the vessel Thursday about 40 miles (about 64 kilometers) off Key Largo, the Coast Guard said in a tweet.

"They didn't have lifejackets or safety equipment," said Capt. Shawn Koch, commanding officer of Air Station Miami. "If the air crew hadn't found them on the patrol, these people would not have survived the night."

Six migrants were repatriated to Cuba, and four others were evacuated to Florida for medical treatment, the Coast Guard said.

The rescue came two weeks after a boat believed to be used for human smuggling capsized off Florida's coast en route from the Bahamas. Only one of the 40 passengers survived.

Black worker at Confederate site raises race complaint

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama welcomes visitors at the "First White House of the Confederacy," a historic home next to the state Capitol where Confederate President Jefferson Davis lived with his family in the early months of the Civil War.

The museum managed by the state's Department of Finance says it hosts nearly 100,000 people a year, many of them school children on field trips to see such things as the "relic room" where Davis' slippers and pocket watch are preserved. Near the gift shop, a framed article describes Davis as an American patriot who accomplished "one of the most amazing feats in history" by keeping the "north at bay for four long years."

Evelyn England, an African-American woman who worked for 12 years as a receptionist at the historic site, said some visitors, both Black and white, were surprised to see her there.

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"I'm in a unique position because whites don't really want me here, and Blacks don't want to come here," England told The Associated Press.

England, 62, retired this week from the \$34,700 state job, and it wasn't the friendliest of departures: State records show she was suspended for three days last month for refusing to sign a performance review, and she said she filed a racial discrimination complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. A spokeswoman said the Department of Finance declined to comment on the personnel matter.

After all those years working among the Davis family's furniture and belongings, England wishes the museum would take a broader view of history. That slavery was a catalyst for the Civil War "is sort of stated around," she said.

"Tell it like it is. Just tell it like it is. This happened. This is what is known to have happened. Give it as absolute truth as you can..... Until that, you are painting a false narrative that this was a gala — no, there were some ugly things that happened," she said.

Explanatory displays at the museum, where the first Confederate flag still flies outside, mostly discuss the furnishings and how rooms were used, and make little to no mention of slavery, which Davis promoted as "a moral, a social and a political blessing."

The residence was salvaged over a century ago by The White House Association, a state-chartered women's organization that still owns its contents and remains involved, even as Finance Department employees staff the site. The legislature mandated in a 1923 law that the state-owned building serve as a "reminder for all time of how pure and great were southern statesmen and southern valor."

It would be better, England believes, if the historic site was managed by the Department of Archives and History.

The museum's curator, Bob Wieland, said Friday that he would ask the board to respond to questions about how the museum is run, but he doesn't think the museum depicts an overly rosy view of Davis.

"Jefferson Davis has never been called great in the house. He was the president of the Confederate States of America. We would say no more, no less than that," Wieland said.

England, who would sometimes give tours, said guides only gave information such as the dates (February-May 1861) when Montgomery served as the Confederacy's capital.

The museum has made some changes over the years. She said there once was an area called a "shrine" to Davis. The gift shop stopped selling Confederate flags, except for stickers of the design that was used when the Confederate capital was in Montgomery.

"They have taken steps. It might be baby steps," she said.

England, who lives in Marion, said she is a distant cousin of Jimmie Lee Jackson, a civil rights activist shot and killed by a state trooper in 1965. His death helped inspire the voting rights marches from Selma to Montgomery that led to passage of the Voting Rights Act. England was a young child at the time, but still recalls the commotion and pain.

In conversations with visitors, England said she would sometimes use questions and humor to try to get them to see a different point of view.

When one person maintained that secession was only about preserving states' rights — a view that had long been taught to southerners as the root cause of the Civil War instead of slavery — she responded, "But did everyone have the same rights?"

"You love the Confederacy for what you think it stood for: Your rights," she would think. "What were they fighting about? Some would say states' rights. I have a problem with your solution of states' rights because all individuals in that state didn't have the same rights."

One day, an older white woman said "Oh, the South will rise!" to no one in particular as she browsed in the gift shop, where the merchandise includes books, stickers of the first Confederate flag and children's toys including teddy bears in Confederate and Union uniforms. When the woman turned around to put more items on the counter, England asked her, "What are you rising from?"

She said the woman didn't reply. "If looks could kill I'd be a dead woman," England said.

But many interactions have been positive, she said, recalling good conversations, even with people who — a supervisor warned — could be prejudiced against her.

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She's been "chewed out" by some African Americans for working there, she added. "It came at me from both sides," she said.

Many visitors — Black and white — found her race a point of curiosity.

"How do you work here?" one white woman asked her.

"Ma'am, if you pay every last one of my bills, I'll quit today," she jokingly replied.

England hopes her presence helped open minds.

"Just open up what you are thinking. That's where the real change is going to occur, in your heart. You can take down monuments. But if what they are still harboring is there, at an inopportune time it will resurface."

Queen marks 70th anniversary with support for Camilla

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Queen Elizabeth II remembered the past and sought to cement the future of the monarchy Sunday as the United Kingdom marked the 70th anniversary of her rule.

In remarks delivered in time for Sunday morning's front pages, the monarch expressed a "sincere wish" that Prince Charles' wife, Camilla, should be known as "Queen Consort" when her son succeeds her as expected. With those words, Elizabeth sought to answer once and for all questions about the status of Camilla, who was initially shunned by fans of the late Princess Diana, Charles' first wife.

"The queen is such a realist and, you know, she's got a business to run," historian Robert Lacey said. "Well, they call it 'The Firm,' don't they? And this really brings Camilla into the firm properly now and for the future."

Britain's longest-serving monarch, the only sovereign most Britons have ever known, Queen Elizabeth II has been a constant presence as Britain navigated the end of empire, the swinging '60s, the labor strife of the 1980s, international terrorism, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In her statement Sunday, the monarch remembered the death of her father, King George VI, which elevated her to the throne, and recalled the seven decades of "extraordinary progress" that her reign has spanned. The queen, now 95, also renewed the pledge she made on her 21st birthday to devote her entire life to the service of the U.K. and the Commonwealth.

But it was her comments about Camilla that made news.

It took years for many in Britain to forgive Charles, whose admitted infidelity and long-time links to Camilla torpedoed his marriage to Diana, known as "the People's Princess." The glamorous young mother of Princes William and Harry died in a Paris car crash in 1997, five years after her messy, public split from Charles.

But the public mood has softened since Charles married Camilla Parker Bowles in 2005.

Now known as the Duchess of Cornwall, Camilla, 74, has taken on roles at more than 100 charities, focusing on a wide range of issues including promoting literacy, supporting victims of domestic violence and helping the elderly.

With a down-to-Earth style and sense of humor, she eventually won over many Britons. Her warmth softened Charles' stuffy image and made him appear more relaxed, if not happier, as he visited houses of worship, unveiled plaques and waited for his chance to reign.

Charles, 73, has long made it clear that he wants Camilla to be known as queen when he ultimately succeeds his mother on the throne. In his own message congratulating his mother's long years of service, Charles thanked her for her support.

"We are deeply conscious of the honour represented by my mother's wish," he said. "As we have sought together to serve and support Her Majesty and the people of our communities, my darling wife has been my own steadfast support throughout."

The queen's comments brought back memories of one of the lowest moments of her reign. The royal family was criticized for its initial silence in the aftermath of Diana's death, with one newspaper proclaiming "Your People Are Suffering. Speak to Us Ma'am."

In backing Charles and Camilla, Elizabeth remembered the support she received from her husband,

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Prince Philip, who died last year after decades at her side, as well as the role her mother played as the wife of a king.

"I am fortunate to have had the steadfast and loving support of my family. I was blessed that, in Prince Philip, I had a partner willing to carry out the role of consort and unselfishly make the sacrifices that go with it," she wrote. "It is a role I saw my own mother perform during my father's reign."

"And when, in the fullness of time, my son Charles becomes King, I know you will give him and his wife Camilla the same support that you have given me," she added.

For now, the queen remains on the job. On Sunday, Buckingham Palace released a photo of the monarch sitting in front of her official red dispatch box with government papers spread out before her.

The monarch spent the day at Sandringham, the country estate in eastern England where her father died on Feb. 6, 1952.

"It is a sad day and one that reminds her of the close relationship she had with him," Lacey, the historical consultant to the Netflix series "The Crown," told The Associated Press. "He liked to consider himself the Squire of Sandringham, not King of Britain. He'd go out and walk the fields, shoot the game. That's what she remembers."

While Sunday's anniversary was low-key, public celebrations of the platinum jubilee are scheduled for June, when the weather is usually sunnier. The festivities will include a military parade, neighborhood parties and a competition to create a new dessert — a mini extravaganza over a four-day weekend June 2-5.

The national reminiscing got underway Sunday, with newspapers and TV reports full of black-and-white images of a young Elizabeth, the glittering new face of the House of Windsor, which was still shaking off the scandal of King Edward VIII's decision to abdicate so he could marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson.

Behind her was World War II and the years of rationing that followed. In front of her were the glimmers of a brighter future.

"One of the reasons why Elizabeth II is greeted with such enthusiasm in 1952 on her accession is because her reign symbolizes new hope and opportunity for renaissance, a new beginning," said historian Ed Owens, author of "The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public 1932-1953." "She embodies a completely new style of monarchy, something that is much more fairytale than what had come before."

And this weekend, the sovereign made clear it's not over.

On Saturday, she made an appearance at a tea party in her honor, the largest public gathering since her health scare last year. Guests reported her wit to be as sharp as ever, though she carried a cane and seemed a bit thinner than usual. Still, she stabbed a massive knife into an anniversary cake, much to the delight of onlookers.

She also promised to keep working.

"It gives me pleasure," she wrote, "to renew to you the pledge I gave in 1947: that my life will always be devoted to your service."

CNN exec Zucker's ouster shows peril of hiding work romance

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For all the potential peril of a workplace romance, the most common source of trouble, experts say, is allowing it to remain a secret.

A case in point was this week's abrupt ouster of longtime CNN chief executive Jeff Zucker, who said he was "wrong" in not being upfront with the network about a consensual relationship he was having with another executive.

Zucker only acknowledged his relationship with CNN chief marketing officer Allison Gollust after being questioned about it during an investigation of now-fired anchor Chris Cuomo. The executive shakeup comes at a pivotal moment for CNN, and prominent employees have expressed dismay that things weren't handled differently.

"He should have known better," said David Lewis, CEO of Operations Inc., an HR consulting firm. "He decided to avoid what was a clearly stated policy by his employer. The problem with that is there was no good outcome once he decided not to tell."

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Zucker is hardly alone in finding love at the office. About a third of U.S. workers say they are in a workplace relationship or have been in one — and the trend has been on the rise since the start of the pandemic, according to trade association Society for Human Resource Management.

Most big corporations have a policy on workplace romance, but the majority of U.S. businesses do not, according to SHRM. Corporate policies can vary from forbidding all relationships to just those between managers and subordinates. Some simply require disclosure.

Among smaller businesses, there are rarely rules at all. Nearly 80% of U.S. workers say that their employer does not require them to disclose a workplace romance, according to the most recent data from SHRM.

And that can cause just as much trouble as employees keeping relationships secret from a company that actually has a policy.

A policy protects workers from “quid pro quo” relationships, it protects a company’s morale, and ideally protects against lawsuits and scandals.

“Companies that choose to look the other way are the ones that are allowing a smoldering fire to turn into an inferno,” said David Lewis, CEO of Operations Inc., a human resources consulting firm. “Countless organizations have chosen to not deal with these head on and have paid dearly as a result.”

The #MeToo movement shed light on toxic — and at times, criminal — workplace sexual misconduct that even the best office-romance policies are unlikely to prevent. That includes film studio Miramax failing to address long-running accusations against Harvey Weinstein, who was eventually convicted of rape and assault, and NBC’s brand being tarnished after sexual misconduct allegations against anchor Matt Lauer.

Hidden consensual romances present their own problems for companies, especially when top executives are involved. Because of the potential for power dynamics to come into play, a relationship with a lower-level employee is usually against policy, even if it is consensual.

When such a relationship comes to light, it often causes a public relations nightmare. In 2019, McDonald’s fired CEO Steve Easterbrook after he acknowledged exchanging videos and text messages in a non-physical, consensual relationship with an employee. McDonald’s forbids managers from having romantic relationships with direct or indirect subordinates. Then, the company sued him in 2020 when other relationships came to light that he had lied about. Easterbrook ended up returning \$105 million to settle the suit.

Having a policy in place is just the first step. Employees may not be aware of it, said Jeff Hyman, CEO of Recruit Rockstars, an online recruiting firm.

“A big problem is, most employees have no idea what their company’s policy is,” he said. “It’s not typically included in an offer letter.”

Another common problem is that employees fear they’ll be punished if they disclose a relationship, or they don’t want human resources involved in a budding romance. So companies need to make it clear that disclosing a relationship helps protect both the employee and the company, and won’t be used against them, said Johnny Taylor, CEO of SHRM.

“The challenge is to communicate to employees that ‘We need you to do this, and nothing negative will happen if you follow this.’”

It’s possible that if Zucker or Gollust had disclosed the relationship at the proper time, CNN could have found alternatives to his resignation, Taylor said.

“While I do not know the details of CNN’s policy, my instinct is that, had Zucker notified his board of the developing relationship instead of them learning of it as a result of an investigation, there’s a very good chance the board would’ve found a better solution — one that did not involve them losing a star talent,” Taylor said.

CNN declined to comment for this article.

Trump tirade on ‘racist’ DAs echoes other racist tropes

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Looking out at a sea of faces at a Texas fairground, most of them white, former President Donald Trump seethed about his legal troubles and blamed them on malicious prosecutors.

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"These prosecutors are vicious, horrible people. They're racists and they're very sick, they're mentally sick," Trump said, before warning his audience: "In reality, they're not after me. They're after you."

He repeated his charge of racism, but skipped over an obvious detail: Those prosecutors are Black.

His diatribe left the clear impression that Trump, who rode the politics of white grievance into the White House, thinks he can't possibly be treated fairly by Black officials.

The comments carry the echoes of racist messages that have proliferated in recent years -- that Black people and other minorities are taking power, and that they will exact revenge on white people, or at the very least treat white people as they have been treated.

That's among the fears stoking the white supremacy movement, the so-called "white replacement theory" that people of color will supplant whites in the country's power dynamics and social structure.

"These are the same justifications that they use for Jim Crow laws and their mistreatment of African Americans. So this is just a rerun of what we've seen in our country," said one Black district attorney, Brian Middleton of Fort Bend County, Texas, which lies southwest of central Houston.

Trump attacking prosecutors is nothing new. When his business and political dealings are investigated, he often strikes back with accusations of misconduct and witch hunts.

The former president has long been accused of biogtry. Before the 2016 election, Trump called U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel a "hater" who could not be fair to him in a fraud case involving Trump University because of the judge's Hispanic heritage and because Trump vowed to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

And after 2017 demonstrations by white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, turned violent, he said at a news conference that there were "very fine people, on both sides."

He had never accused his prosecutors of racism before -- but then, until the start of the year, one of those attorneys was Cyrus Vance Jr., who is white.

Now he faces an array of Black prosecutors: New York Attorney General Letitia James; Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, Vance's successor and the first Black person to hold that office; Fani Willis, the Fulton County, Georgia, DA; even Rep. Bennie Thompson, the leader of the congressional investigation into the Jan. 6 insurrection. And critics say Trump's rhetoric has escalated, perhaps because he recognizes that some among his base are receptive to more overt racism.

"It intensifies that discourse and makes it explicitly racial," said Casey Kelly, a communications professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who for years has pored over transcripts of Trump's speeches.

At a recent rally in Arizona, he said -- falsely -- that white people in New York were being sent to the back of line for antiviral treatments.

And now Trump is using the investigations against him -- and the prosecutors behind them -- as "evidence of a larger systemic pattern that white people don't have a place in the future of America and he's the only one that can fight on their behalf," Kelly said.

Michael Steele, who more than a decade ago was the first African American to chair the Republican National Committee, said Trump was being Trump.

"If he can race bait it, he will. These prosecutors, these Black people are coming after me -- the white man," Steele said.

"They didn't just wake up and say, 'I'm gonna waste city resources and state resources to go after Donald Trump,'" said Steele, a member of the Lincoln Project, a Republican group opposed to the former president. "Whether the prosecutors are Black or white, his corruption is still the same. It's him, his actions, his behavior, his decisions -- and that's where the onus lies."

There is evidence that Trump's words have had consequences. Willis -- the Georgia prosecutor who asked a judge to impanel a special grand jury to help probe possible "criminal disruptions" by Trump and his allies during the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath -- told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that threats and racist slurs against her have increased since Trump's rally in Texas.

In a letter to the FBI, Willis called Trump's rhetoric "alarming." She called on the FBI to help assess security at the county courthouse and provide personnel to protect the area against possible attack, like the one on the U.S. Capitol a year ago.

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Trump has his defenders. Harrison Fields, who worked in the Trump White House, now serves as a spokesman for U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds of Florida, a Trump ally and one of only two Black Republicans serving in the House. He said the country has more important matters to tackle.

Donalds sees Trump's remarks as "a nonstory, as do about 98% of the American public, who are not in the media, or who are not in the Democrat Party," Fields said.

"The congressman is focused on issues that actually matter, which is supporting the America-first policies of the former president," he said.

The flip side of Trump's aspersions of Black prosecutorial power is the argument that it has been too long in coming.

The country's system of law and order has long subjugated African Americans — from slavery through the days of Jim Crow until today, some would argue, as some states adopt anti-protest laws and tighter control over the ballot box. Black inmates still disproportionately occupy jail and prison cells.

A 2019 study by the Reflective Democracy Campaign found that only 5% of the country's elected prosecutors were of color. But Black men and women now lead some of the country's largest prosecutorial offices, including those in New York, Chicago, Dallas and Detroit.

Trump is questioning their legitimacy, said Diana Becton, another Black district attorney who serves in Contra Costa County in the San Francisco Bay area.

"His accusations are certainly not subtle. They're frightening," Becton said. "It's like saying, we are out of our place, that we're being uppity and we are going to be put back in our place by people who look like him."

Middleton, the Texas DA, added that it's not about unjust laws. There are double standards in how laws are applied. And one remedy is to diversify the people who enforce those laws.

"Certain people get away with things and so we need people who are willing to hold people like Donald Trump accountable," he said, "where we have to have people in positions of authority who will make sure that all people are treated the same under the law."

Moguls skier Kauf delivers the love and wins Olympic silver

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

ZHANGJIAKOU, China (AP) — At the Teton Club in Alta, Wyoming, they clung to one simple phrase as the bedlam gained steam while their daughter, sister and friend, Jaelin Kauf, edged closer and closer to the Olympic silver medal: "Deliver the love."

Kauf delivered the love. A spot on the podium was a fitting reward to go with it.

Half a world away from Alta, the 25-year-old Kauf finished second Sunday in freestyle moguls, an event her family has set the standard in over decades. Kauf's mom, Patti, and her dad, Scott, are multiple-time champions in the freestyle discipline from back in the '80s and '90s. Patti also won three Winter X Games titles in skicross.

They gathered at Scott's bar with around 100 of their closest friends to watch Jaelin make a trip down the hill that will force a bit of rearranging in the family trophy case. The action started at 4:30 a.m. in Wyoming.

"She had the biggest smile on top of the course and everyone's like 'She's got it,'" Patti said. "She smiled every run. Her motto was to go out and deliver the love, which is to remind her about her love of the sport. And that's what she did. And I couldn't be more proud."

It wasn't always so easy to keep things that simple.

Kauf spent time as the top-ranked skier in the world and went into the Pyeongchang Games among the favorites to win a medal. But moguls is one of the most fickle events on snow. She finished seventh there. She bashed into a tree and suffered a back injury at the beginning of last year. All of that made her wonder if keeping on in this sport was really worth it.

That's how "Deliver the love" became the catchiest phrase in Alta.

"I got into the sport because I love it, and that's why I'm still competing in it," Kauf said. "Every time I

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push out the start gate for training or competition, I just want to deliver the love and do it without reason.”

Her parents signed onto that outlook quickly.

“It wasn’t about the medals,” Patti said. “It wasn’t about anything else but just going out there and having her best run every day.”

On the night — or make that, the morning — of her Olympic triumph, the Kaufs gave a lot of credit to big brother Skyler.

“He kept it together tonight when everyone was losing it,” Patti said.

There was a short time when Kauf actually held the lead in the big final and a gold medal looked within reach. Australia’s Jakara Anthony ended up taking the top spot, but that had nothing to do with why the folks at the Tetonia were losing it.

“It was because our daughter and sister is skiing in the — I don’t want to swear — but skiing in the Olympics,” Scott Kauf said. “And laying down run after run after run. It’s like, how do you not lose it? You worked your whole life for that.”

Luge’s new king: Germany’s Johannes Ludwig wins Olympic gold

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Johannes Ludwig let all his rivals know back in November that he would be the one to beat at the Beijing Olympics.

He was right.

Ludwig is the Olympic men’s luge champion for the first time, making him the oldest — he’s eight days shy of turning 36 — to win that race’s gold medal. Ludwig finished four runs at the Yanqing Sliding Center in 3 minutes, 48.735 seconds, 0.160 seconds ahead of Wolfgang Kindl of Austria and 0.951 seconds ahead of bronze medalist Dominik Fischnaller of Italy.

“I had a lot of not-so-successful years,” Ludwig said. “In 2014, I didn’t qualify for the Olympics. I had a lot of fourth places at world championships; I think maybe five. The fun of this sport is to always continue pushing, and I think this medal is a sign that I did the right thing.”

It’s no surprise that a German won, and shouldn’t be a surprise that this was Ludwig’s turn. There have been 16 Olympic men’s luge races; a German man has won 11 of them. Ludwig was the bronze medalist at the Pyeongchang Games four years ago, then made it clear that he would be the one to catch at the Beijing Games when he arrived in China for the season-opening World Cup race and simply routed the field.

“I know this moment and Johannes, he’s worked a long time for this medal,” said Felix Loch, a two-time Olympic champion from Germany who was fourth and embraced Ludwig warmly when the race was over. “And now he’s got the medal. It’s great for him and we will celebrate with him.”

Ludwig was nearly a second better than anyone else in that World Cup this past fall, which is just two heats, not the Olympic four. His winning margin at that World Cup was the biggest luge had seen in nearly eight years, a simply dominant showing.

Kindl closed the gap between Ludwig and the rest of the world at the Beijing Games.

Just not by enough.

And with that, the dream season for Ludwig is complete — World Cup overall champion, and now, the Olympic crown. He already knew what Olympic gold felt like after being part of the team that won the relay for Germany in Pyeongchang.

This time, though, the top of the podium was his and his alone.

Kindl grabbed an Austrian flag when his race was done, perfectly content with Olympic silver. Fischnaller couldn’t contain his celebration when he clinched his medal, hugging longtime partner Emily Sweeney of the United States — she competes in the women’s race that starts Monday — and screaming into the frosty air.

“I hope it’s a very good omen and maybe she has something around her neck in two days,” Fischnaller said.

Ludwig was the bronze medalist at the Pyeongchang Games, denying Fischnaller a medal there by 0.002

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seconds — nowhere near enough time to even blink. Fischnaller carried that disappointment for four years. “Finally, I have it now and I’m very excited, happy, relieved,” Fischnaller said.

Defending Olympic gold medalist David Gleirscher of Austria had trouble in both runs Sunday and finished only 15th.

The field was cut from 34 sliders to 20 for the fourth and final run, and all three American men advanced to the fourth heat. Chris Mazdzer, the silver medalist from the Pyeongchang Games, was eighth. Tucker West finished 13th — his best finish in three Olympic appearances. And Jonny Gustafson was 19th in his Olympic debut.

“I’ll definitely take eighth,” said Mazdzer, who will compete in the team relay later this week for what will almost certainly be his final Olympic event. “My best finish this year. It feels good. It does.”

By the time the fourth and final run came around, it was clearly a two-man race. Barring disaster, either Ludwig or Kindl would be the winner; Ludwig’s margin over Kindl was 0.112 seconds after three runs, 0.722 seconds — that’s a big margin in luge — over the third-place Fischnaller.

Ludwig, the last sled on the track, was flawless.

He would not let gold slip away, grabbing at his helmet in disbelief before jumping into a mob of happy German athletes and coaches to begin the celebration.

“I’m pretty happy,” Ludwig said.

Among other notables, Fan Duoyao — China’s first men’s luge Olympian — was 24th. Mateusz Sochowicz of Poland, the slider who broke his left kneecap and cut his right leg to the bone in a training accident at the Yanqing track in November, was 25th.

And Saba Kumaritashvili, the cousin of Nodar Kumartashvili — the slider from the former Soviet republic of Georgia who died in a training accident hours before the 2010 Vancouver Games officially opened — was 31st. He crossed the finish line, smiled broadly and pumped his fists in celebration.

“I’m very happy,” Kumaritashvili said. “I’ve done what I needed.”

He left feeling like a winner. So did many others. Ludwig just topped them all.

EXPLAINER: What happens to Europe’s energy if Russia acts?

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ, DAVID MCHUGH and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Fears are rising about what would happen to Europe’s energy supply if Russia were to invade Ukraine and then shut off natural gas exports in retaliation for U.S. and European sanctions.

The tensions show the risk of Europe’s reliance on Russia for energy, which supplies about a third of the continent’s natural gas. And Europe’s stockpile is already low. While the U.S. has pledged to help by boosting exports of liquefied natural gas, or LNG, there’s only so much it can produce at once.

It leaves Europe in a potential crisis, with its gas already sapped by a cold winter last year, a summer with little renewable energy generation and Russia delivering less than usual. Prices have skyrocketed, squeezing households and businesses.

Here’s what to know about Europe’s energy supply if tensions boil over into war and Russia is hit with sanctions:

WILL RUSSIA CUT OFF GAS SUPPLIES TO EUROPE?

No one knows for sure, but a complete shutoff is seen as unlikely, because it would be mutually destructive.

Russian officials have not signaled they would consider cutting supplies in the case of new sanctions. Moscow relies on energy exports, and though it just signed a gas deal with China, Europe is a key source of revenue.

Europe is likewise dependent on Russia, so any Western sanctions would likely avoid directly targeting Russian energy supplies.

More likely, experts say, would be Russia withholding gas sent through pipelines crossing Ukraine. Russia pumped 175 billion cubic meters of gas into Europe last year, nearly a quarter of it through those pipelines,

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according to S&P Global Platts. That would leave pipelines under the Baltic Sea and through Poland still operating.

"I think in the event of even a less severe Russian attack against Ukraine, the Russians are almost certain to cut off gas transiting Ukraine on the way to Germany," said former U.S. diplomat Dan Fried, who as State Department coordinator for sanctions policy helped craft 2014 measures against Russia when it invaded and annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

Russia could then offer to make up the lost gas if Germany approves the contentious new Nord Stream 2 pipeline, whose operators could face potential U.S. sanctions even though a recent vote to that effect failed.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" that the Biden administration has coordinated with its allies and that "if Russia invades Ukraine, one way or another, Nord Stream 2 will not move forward."

Interrupting gas supplies beyond the Ukrainian pipelines is less likely: "If they push it too far, they're going to make a breach with Europe irreparable, and they have to sell the oil and gas someplace," Fried said.

WHAT CAN THE U.S. DO?

It's a major gas producer and already is sending record levels of liquefied natural gas, or LNG, by ship worldwide. It could only help Europe a little.

"We're talking about small increases to the size of U.S. exports, whereas the hole that Europe would need to fill if Russia backed away or if Europe cut Russia off would be much larger than that," said Ross Wyeno, lead analyst for Americas LNG at S&P.

The Biden administration has been talking with gas producers worldwide about whether they can boost output and ship to Europe, and it has been working to identify supplies of natural gas from North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the U.S.

The administration also is talking with buyers about holding off.

"Is there some other country that was planning to get an LNG shipment that doesn't need it and could give it to Europe?" said Amy Myers Jaffe, managing director of the Climate Policy Lab at Tufts University, mentioning Brazil or countries in Asia.

Over the past month, two-thirds of American LNG exports went to Europe. Some ships filled with LNG were heading to Asia but turned around to go to Europe because buyers there offered to pay higher prices, S&P said.

IS THERE ENOUGH LIQUEFIED GAS WORLDWIDE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

Not in the event of a full cutoff, and it can't be increased overnight. Export terminals cost billions of dollars to build and are working at capacity in the U.S.

Even if all Europe's LNG import facilities were operating at capacity, the amount of gas would only be about two-thirds of what Russia sends via pipelines, Jaffe said.

And there could be challenges distributing the LNG to parts of Europe that have fewer pipeline connections.

If Russia stopped sending just the gas that goes through Ukraine, it would take the equivalent of about 1.27 shiploads of additional LNG per day to replace that supply, said Luke Cottell, senior LNG analyst at S&P. Russia also could reroute some of that gas through other pipelines, reducing the need for additional LNG to about a half-shipload per day, he said.

IS RUSSIA ALREADY SUPPLYING LESS GAS?

Russia has been fulfilling its long-term contracts to supply gas to Europe, but it's been selling less on the spot market and hasn't been filling the storage containers it owns in Europe, experts say.

"It's already happened. It's not theoretical," Jaffe said.

Russian cutbacks to spot gas supplies have contributed to sharply higher natural gas prices in Europe. They went as high as 166 euros (\$190) per megawatt hour in December, more than eight times their level at the start of 2021. Prices have fallen to under 80 euros per kilowatt hour as more LNG arrives.

But consumers are feeling the crunch in higher electric and gas bills. European governments are rolling out subsidies and tax breaks to ease the financial stress on households.

IS THERE IMPACT IN THE U.S.?

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As the U.S. ramped up LNG exports, domestic prices of natural gas also rose. More than 10% of gas produced in the U.S. last year was exported, said Clark Williams-Derry, analyst at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

U.S. gas prices spiked by more than 30% in the last week of January, primarily because of an approaching winter storm in New England, Williams-Derry said. But prices also were affected by tighter U.S. supplies amid uncertainty over Russia, he said.

"Russia is disturbing European gas markets, with the U.S. talking about exporting basically the next 'Berlin airlift' for natural gas to Europe," he said.

If the U.S. pushes for increased LNG exports, prices at home would likely rise, Williams-Derry added.

Ten Democratic senators, led by Jack Reed of Rhode Island and Angus King of Maine, recently urged the Energy Department to study the effect of higher exports on domestic prices and pause approvals of proposed terminals. They said they understood "geopolitical factors" give rise to sending more gas.

"However, the administration must also consider the potential increase in cost to American families," the senators said.

Smooth run on bumpy course nets Anthony Olympic moguls title

By PAT GRAHAM AP Sports Writer

ZHANGJIAKOU, China (AP) — Jakara Anthony doesn't watch anyone race before her. She avoids glancing at any scores, too.

The approach keeps the stress away and frees her up to ski like this: to a gold medal.

The 23-year-old from Australia made it look almost easy Sunday, breezing through the bumps as the last competitor of the night to capture the women's moguls title at the Beijing Olympics.

Anthony's back flip with a grab at the bottom all but sewed up the win on the Secret Garden Olympic course. She instantly knew, too. Maybe not so much that she had secured the top spot, but that it was good enough to be win-worthy.

"I was just so happy with that and content with that and no matter what the outcome was, I was going to be stoked," she said. "To see the No. 1 come up next my name, it was incredible."

Her score of 83.09 edged Jaelin Kauf, who was poised to pick up the first gold medal for Team USA at this year's Winter Games. Russian athlete Anastasiia Smirnova earned the bronze and defending champion Perrine Laffont of France was fourth.

Anthony joins Dale Begg-Smith as the only Aussies to win the Olympic moguls event. Begg-Smith earned his title at the 2006 Turin Games.

Her reward may just be to treat herself to one of her favorite spots — the beach.

"If I had to go somewhere right now, I'd love some warm weather," Anthony said after competing in the frigid temperatures.

Maybe some ice cream, too. A celebratory scoop.

Anthony needed to be at her best after Kauf's electric run right before her. Although Kauf was faster from top to bottom, Anthony's form appeared a smidge cleaner and her jumps a little more difficult.

Still, it was an incredible bounce-back Olympic performance for Kauf, who entered the Pyeongchang Games four years ago as the top-ranked moguls skier only to finish a disappointing seventh.

The difference was simple: focus.

"I was skiing to win every single round," Kauf said of her strategy this time around. "I wanted to walk away with absolutely no regrets in my skiing and just put it all out there 100% every time."

Kauf is the next generation of daredevils in her family. Her mother, Patti, and father, Scott, picked up plenty of moguls titles back in their day. But she now has the nicest prize of all — an Olympic silver medal.

The hardware will pair nicely with the gold and silver Olympic-themed necklaces her mom custom-made for her as good-luck charms before each of the last two Winter Games.

"That's going to go great with it," Kauf said with a smile. "I'm just so happy right now. I honestly can't believe it."

Olivia Giaccio of the United States made it to the last round of finals and finished sixth. Hannah Soar narrowly missed making the last round.

Anthony added to the big day for the Southern Hemisphere at the Genting Snow Park. Earlier and just a quick walk away from the moguls course, Zoi Sadowski Synnott captured New Zealand's first Winter Games gold in the women's slopestyle competition, while Tess Coady of Australia took bronze.

In the slopestyle race, American Julia Marino was looking at gold before Sadowski Synnott's winning run. Same thing with Kauf before Anthony came through in the clutch.

"I'm just over the moon," Anthony said. "I'm just lost for words."

American teen Kai Owens made her first official trip down the Olympic course Sunday after sitting out the opening round of qualification the other day because of a swollen eye suffered in a nasty training crash. Owens earned a spot into the first and second round of finals before being eliminated.

This has been quite a journey for Owens, the 17-year-old American who returned to the country where she was born for the Beijing Games. Abandoned at a town square in China as an infant, she was taken to an orphanage and adopted at around 16 months by a couple from Colorado.

Moroccans in mourning after trapped boy's death

By MOSA'AB ELSHAMY and TARIK EL-BARAKAH Associated Press

IGHRAN, Morocco (AP) — An eerie silence fell on a Moroccan village on Sunday after the death of a 5-year-old boy who had been trapped in a well for four days.

For days — and nights — the community of Ighran, a village in a mountainous area in northern Morocco, had gathered along the edges of the well, cheering on the rescue workers and volunteers digging deep into difficult terrain to reach the hole where the boy, Rayan, was trapped. They offered support to Rayan's parents. Millions watched the rescue operation on state TV.

The boy was pulled out Saturday night by rescuers after a lengthy operation that captivated global attention. Convinced that Rayan was alive, the crowd was cheering as the child was rushed to an ambulance where his parents had been waiting.

Just minutes after the ambulance pulled away, a statement from the royal palace said the boy has died. Moroccan King Mohammed VI expressed his condolences to the boy's parents, Khaled Oram and Wasima Khersheesh.

Messages of support, concern and grief for the boy and his family poured in from around the world as the news of Rayan's death spread overnight Saturday.

Pope Francis on Sunday described as "beautiful" how people had rallied around efforts to save Rayan's life. Francis expressed thanks to the Moroccan people as he greeted the public in St. Peter's Square. He praised people for "putting their all" into trying to save the child.

The palace statement said Morocco's king had been closely following the frantic rescue efforts by locals authorities, "instructing officials to use all means necessary to dig the boy out of the well and return him alive to his parents." The king hailed the rescuers for their relentless work and the community for lending support to Rayan's family.

Rayan fell into a 32-meter (105-foot) well located outside his home on Tuesday evening. The exact circumstances of how he fell are unclear.

For three days, search crews used bulldozers to dig a parallel ditch. Then on Friday, they started excavating a horizontal tunnel to reach the trapped boy. Morocco's MAP news agency said that experts in topographical engineering were called upon for help.

Rescuers used a rope to send oxygen and water down to the boy as well as a camera to monitor him. By Saturday morning, the head of the rescue committee, Abdelhadi Temrani, said: "It is not possible to determine the child's condition at all at this time. But we hope to God that the child is alive."

The work had been especially difficult because of fears that the soil surrounding the well could collapse on the boy.

The village of about 500 people is dotted with deep wells, many used for irrigating the cannabis crop

that is the main source of income for many in the poor, remote and arid region of Morocco's Rif Mountains. Most of the wells have protective covers.

AP investigation: Women's prison fostered culture of abuse

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inside one of the only federal women's prisons in the United States, inmates say they have been subjected to rampant sexual abuse by correctional officers and even the warden, and were often threatened or punished when they tried to speak up.

Prisoners and workers at the federal correctional institution in Dublin, California, even have a name for it: "The rape club."

An Associated Press investigation has found a permissive and toxic culture at the Bay Area lockup, enabling years of sexual misconduct by predatory employees and cover-ups that have largely kept the abuse out of the public eye.

The AP obtained internal federal Bureau of Prisons documents, statements and recordings from inmates, interviewed current and former prison employees and inmates and reviewed thousands of pages of court records from criminal and civil cases involving Dublin prison staff.

Together, they detail how inmates' allegations against members of the mostly male staff were ignored or set aside, how prisoners could be sent to solitary confinement for reporting abuse and how officials in charge of preventing and investigating sexual misconduct were themselves accused of abusing inmates or neglecting their concerns.

In one instance, a female inmate said a man, who was her prison work supervisor, taunted her by remarking "let the games begin" when he assigned her to work with a maintenance foreman she accused of rape. Another worker claimed he wanted to get inmates pregnant. The warden — the man in charge at Dublin — kept nude photos on his government-issued cellphone of a woman he is accused of assaulting.

One inmate said she was "overwhelmed with fear, anxiety, and anger, and cried uncontrollably" after enduring abuse and retaliation at Dublin. Another said she contemplated suicide when her cries for help went unheeded and now suffers from severe anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

All sexual activity between a prison worker and an inmate is illegal. Correctional employees enjoy substantial power over inmates, controlling every aspect of their lives from mealtime to lights out, and there is no scenario in which an inmate can give consent.

The allegations at Dublin, which so far have resulted in four arrests, are endemic of a larger problem within the beleaguered Bureau of Prisons. In 2020, the same year some of the women at Dublin complained, there were 422 complaints of staff-on-inmate sexual abuse across the system of 122 prisons and 153,000 inmates. The agency said it substantiated only four of those complaints and that 290 are still being investigated. It would not say whether the allegations were concentrated in women's prisons or spread throughout the system.

A hotbed of corruption and misconduct, the federal prison system has been plagued by myriad crises in recent years, including widespread criminal activity among employees, critically low staffing levels that have hampered responses to emergencies, the rapid spread of COVID-19, a failed response to the pandemic and dozens of escapes. Last month, the embattled director, Michael Carvajal, announced he was resigning. On Monday, two inmates were killed in a gang clash at a federal penitentiary in Texas, prompting a nationwide lockdown.

The AP contacted lawyers for every Dublin prison employee charged with sexual abuse or named as a defendant in a lawsuit alleging abuse, and tried reaching the men directly through available phone numbers and email addresses. None responded to interview requests. A government lawyer representing one of the men being sued declined comment.

Thahesha Jusino, taking over as Dublin's warden at the end of the month, promised to "work tirelessly to reaffirm the Bureau of Prisons' zero tolerance for sexual abuse and sexual harassment."

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She said the agency is fully cooperating with the Justice Department's inspector general on active investigations and noted that a "vast majority" of these cases were referred for investigation by the Bureau of Prisons itself.

"I am committed to ensuring the safety of our inmates, staff, and the public," Jusino said in a statement to the AP. "A culture of misconduct, or actions not representative of the BOP's Core Values will not be tolerated."

The Justice Department said in a statement that "Zero tolerance means exactly that. The Justice Department is committed to both holding accountable any staff who violate their position of trust and to preventing these crimes from happening in the first place."

FCI Dublin, about 21 miles (34 kilometers) east of Oakland, was opened in 1974. It was converted in 2012 to one of six women-only facilities in the federal prison system. Actresses Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman both served time there for their involvement in a college admissions bribery scandal.

As of Feb. 1, it had about 750 inmates, many serving sentences for drug crimes. There are increasingly more women behind bars but they are still a minority — only about 6.5% of the overall federal inmate population.

Union officials say the vast majority of Dublin employees are honest and hardworking, and are upset that the allegations and actions of some workers have tarnished the prison's reputation.

"We have a diversified staff. We have veterans. We have ex-law enforcement. We have good people, and they're very traumatized," Dublin union president Ed Canales said.

Inmates and prison workers who spoke to the AP did not want their names published for fear of retaliation. The AP also does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault unless they grant permission.

Women made the first internal complaints to staff members about five years ago, court records and internal agency documents show, but it's not clear whether those complaints ever went anywhere. The women say they were largely ignored, and the abuse continued.

One inmate who reported a 2017 sexual assault said she was told nothing would be done about her complaint because it was a "he said-she said." The woman, who is now suing the Bureau of Prisons over her treatment, said she was fired from her prison commissary job as retaliation. When she went to report her firing, she said a Dublin counselor took her abuser's side, responding: "Child, do you want him to lose his job?" The woman was moved to a different prison a week later.

In 2019, another Dublin inmate sued — first on her own with handwritten papers, then with the backing of a powerful San Francisco law firm — alleging that a maintenance foreman repeatedly raped her and that other workers facilitated the abuse and mocked her for it. When an internal prison investigator finally caught wind of what was happening, the woman said she was the one who got punished with three months in solitary confinement and a transfer to a federal prison in Alabama.

Then, in 2020, another inmate's report that Dublin workers were abusing inmates broke through to the Justice Department's inspector general and the FBI, triggering a criminal investigation that has led to the arrest of four employees, including former warden Ray J. Garcia, in the past seven months. They each face up to 15 years in prison, though in other recent cases, sentences have ranged from three months to two years.

Two of the men are expected to plead guilty in the coming weeks in federal court to charges of sexual abuse of a ward. None of the men accused in civil suits has been charged with crimes. Several Dublin workers are under investigation, though it's not clear whether the men accused in the civil suits are among them.

The FBI said Friday that it is continuing to investigate and is looking for anyone who may have been victimized to come forward and speak with agents.

The former warden, arrested last September, is accused of molesting an inmate as she tried to push him away. Garcia made her and another inmate strip naked as he did rounds and took pictures that were

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found on his personal laptop computer and government-issued cell phone when the FBI raided his office and home last summer, prosecutors said. The abuse ended when the pandemic exploded and women were locked in their cells, they said. Garcia was later promoted; the Bureau of Prisons said it didn't know about the abuse until later.

"If they're undressing, I've already looked," Garcia, 54, told the FBI in July 2021, according to court records. "I don't, like, schedule a time like 'you be undressed, and I'll be there.'"

Garcia, who was placed on leave after the raid and retired a month after his arrest, is also accused of using his authority to intimidate one of his victims, telling her that he was "close friends" with the person responsible for investigating staff misconduct and boasting that he could not be fired, prosecutors said.

Ross Klinger, 36, a Dublin prison recycling technician, is scheduled to plead guilty on Thursday to charges he sexually abused at least two inmates between March and September 2020, including inside a warehouse and in a shipping container on prison grounds while another inmate acted as a lookout.

Klinger told the women he wanted to marry them and father their children, even proposing to one of them with a diamond ring after she was discharged to a halfway house, prosecutors said. Another prisoner aware of the abuse reported Klinger to the Bureau of Prisons in June 2020, according to the FBI, but he was still allowed to transfer to a federal jail in San Diego months later.

Despite the move, prosecutors said, Klinger kept contacting one of victim through an email address he created with a phony name, sometimes sending lewd messages referencing sexual acts, and messaged the other woman on Snapchat, saying he loved her and was "willing to do anything" for her.

Interviewed by investigators in April 2021, Klinger denied any wrongdoing, but said that because of the allegations his life was over and that he was concerned about going to prison and being labeled as a sex offender. He was in handcuffs two months later.

"Sexual misconduct of a ward, you can't come back from that," Klinger told investigators in the interview, according to court documents.

John Russell Bellhouse, 39, a prison safety administrator, is scheduled to be arraigned this month on charges he sexually abused an inmate he called his "girlfriend" from February to December 2020. He was placed on leave in March and arrested in December.

James Theodore Highhouse, 49, a prison chaplain, has already signed a plea agreement and is scheduled to plead guilty Feb. 23 to charges he put his penis on an inmate's genitals, mouth and hand and masturbated in front of her in 2018 and 2019, and that he lied to investigators when questioned about the abuse. He was arrested last month.

Garcia, the highest-ranking federal prison official arrested in more than 10 years, had an outside influence as warden over how Dublin handled employee sexual misconduct. He led staff and inmate training on reporting abuse and complying with the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act, known as PREA, and had control over staff discipline, including in cases of sexual abuse. In his prior role as associate warden, he had had disciplinary authority over all inmates, but not staff.

He was also in charge of the legally required "rape elimination" compliance audit, first scheduled for early 2020 but not completed until last September — about the time he was arrested. The Bureau of Prisons blamed the pandemic for the delay and said the audit, Dublin's first since 2017, is not yet finalized and cannot be made public.

In private, Garcia was flouting measures put in place to protect inmates from sexual abuse and he later panicked that he would get caught for his own alleged misbehavior, court records show. The woman Garcia is accused of assaulting told investigators that one instance of abuse happened while PREA officials were visiting the prison. Garcia assaulted her in a changing stall designed for PREA-compliant searches, she said.

Publicly, Garcia appeared to take a hard line on abuse. In one of his first acts after he was named warden in November 2020, he recommended firing the maintenance foreman William Martinez, accused of rape in the 2019 suit — albeit for what the staff disciplinary process narrowed to a finding of an "appearance of an inappropriate relationship with an inmate."

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Martinez has denied the allegations and has filed a discrimination complaint against the Bureau of Prisons with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. He has not been charged with a crime.

Garcia tasked another official with making a final decision on punishment and that person reduced the penalty to a 15-day suspension, but even that was later overturned. Internal documents obtained by the AP show that prison officials failed to look into the allegations against Martinez for nearly two years and then, after the investigation finished, waited another year to propose discipline.

An administrative judge wrote in June that the prison's protracted investigation "strains credulity" on a matter as serious as alleged sexual abuse.

But the judge also found that prison officials cherry-picked evidence to bolster their case, only to end up unraveling it. He reversed the suspension and ordered the Bureau of Prisons to provide back pay.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Feb. 7, the 38th day of 2022. There are 327 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 7, 1964, the Beatles arrived at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport to begin their first American tour.

On this date:

In 1857, a French court acquitted author Gustave Flaubert of obscenity for his serialized novel "Madame Bovary."

In 1943, the government abruptly announced that wartime rationing of shoes made of leather would go into effect in two days, limiting consumers to buying three pairs per person per year. (Rationing was lifted in October 1945.)

In 1948, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower resigned as U.S. Army chief of staff; he was succeeded by Gen. Omar Bradley.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy imposed a full trade embargo on Cuba.

In 1971, women in Switzerland gained the right to vote through a national referendum, 12 years after a previous attempt failed.

In 1984, space shuttle Challenger astronauts Bruce McCandless II and Robert L. Stewart went on the first untethered spacewalk, which lasted nearly six hours.

In 1985, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena was kidnapped in Guadalupe, Mexico, by drug traffickers who tortured and murdered him.

In 1991, Jean-Bertrand Aristide (zhahn behr-TRAHN' ahr-ihs-TEED') was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president of Haiti (he was overthrown by the military the following September).

In 1999, Jordan's King Hussein died of cancer at age 63; he was succeeded by his eldest son, Abdullah (ab-DUH'-luh).

In 2009, a miles-wide section of ice in Lake Erie broke away from the Ohio shoreline, trapping about 135 fishermen, some for as long as four hours before they could be rescued (one man fell into the water and later died of an apparent heart attack).

In 2014, the Sochi Olympics opened with a celebration of Russia's past greatness and hopes for future glory.

In 2020, two days after his acquittal in his first Senate impeachment trial, President Donald Trump took retribution against two officials who had delivered damaging testimony; he ousted Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, a national security aide, and Gordon Sondland, his ambassador to the European Union.

Ten years ago: In a setback for Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum swept GOP caucuses in Minnesota and Colorado and a non-binding primary in Missouri. A federal appeals court ruled California's ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional, but gave gay marriage opponents time to appeal the decision before ordering the state to allow such weddings to resume.

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Five years ago: Charter school advocate Betsy DeVos won confirmation as education secretary by the slimmest of margins, pushed to approval only by the historic tie-breaking vote of Vice President Mike Pence.

One year ago: After moving south to a new team and conference, Tom Brady led the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to a 31-9 Super Bowl victory over the Kansas City Chiefs on the Buccaneers' home field. Despite an order from Tampa Mayor Jane Castor requiring masks at Super Bowl parties, videos went viral on social media showing throngs of mostly maskless fans and packed sports bars as the hometown Buccaneers won the championship. Pope Francis resumed greeting the public in St. Peter's Square, seven weeks after he interrupted the Sunday noon ritual to discourage crowds from gathering during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's Birthdays: Author Gay Talese is 90. Former Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., is 87. Sen. John Hickenlooper, D-Colo., is 70. Comedy writer Robert Smigel (SMY'-guh) is 62. Actor James Spader is 62. Country singer Garth Brooks is 60. Rock musician David Bryan (Bon Jovi) is 60. Actor-comedian Eddie Izzard is 60. Actor-comedian Chris Rock is 57. Actor Jason Gedrick is 55. Actor Essence Atkins is 50. Rock singer-musician Wes Borland is 47. Rock musician Tom Blankenship (My Morning Jacket) is 44. Actor Ashton Kutcher is 44. Actor Tina Majorino is 37. Actor Deborah Ann Woll is 37. NBA player Isaiah Thomas is 33. NHL center Steven Stamkos is 32.